

**Fourth World Dynamics :
JHARKHAND**

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Edited by
Nirmal Sengupta

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TO THE MEMORY OF
Com. Sadanand Jha
(See p. 39)**

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PREFACE

India ranks highest in the world—barring Africa alone—in proportion of tribal population to the total population. Yet the tribal situation in India has been much less disturbing than the cultural extinction (ethnocide) or extermination (genocide) the tribesmen have faced in many other parts of the world. Indeed, few countries have made more efforts than India to protect the rights of their indigenous people and to integrate them into national development planning. But in spite of all these efforts the tension in tribal areas has been on the increase over all these years; and instead of integration the tribal politics is veering more and more towards distinct identities, in the form of regional autonomy or even secession. In the eastern frontier, several tribes have already succeeded in wrestling away separate states for themselves. Regional autonomy movements are also important with varying intensities, in Uttarakhand and in the Central tribal belt of the country with their demands of Jharkhand, Gondwana, Bastar or Bhillwana states.

Liberal critics did point out since the early 'sixties that development in the country was uneven. In the 'seventies, radicals took over the task. What was known as the 'problem of backward regions' to the liberals began being posed as the problem of 'internal colonialism'. The initiative of the officials was lost to the rising demand of 'fair share for the sons of the soil', 'regional self-determination' and even 'extradiction of outsiders'. Against this development all the old modes of thinking became obsolete. The developmental policy of the government was transformed into a patchwork of conciliatory policies, to contain the populist movements. The social scientists suddenly found themselves in a state where rarely any of the

earlier works could be of any relevance. Social workers found their precarious positions to preserve distinct identities from the political activists. Even the politicians and the trade unionists were at a loss when conflicts began to occur between the seemingly non-antagonistic classes and communities. Such a chaos, however, is not peculiar to India ; since the 'seventies this has been the trend all over the world. Hunt and Schwartz (*A Critique of Economic Theory*, Penguin, London, 1972 : 32) describing the condition in economic sciences as 'all things cry out give us new forms, new ways of thinking' is repeated in all branches of development studies.

There exists hundreds of studies about the tribal people in India and their problems ; but rarely one is relevant in understanding the present situation and the crisis. But objections to those studies, as are revealed by the present upsurges in the tribal areas, are sometimes more serious. "Developmental" projects by the government could not be launched because of intense popular resistance. The sincere economic planner trying to divert more of investment funds to the underdeveloped regions may be baffled ; but his plans would work out in reality as contrary to the interests of the local people for reasons incomprehensible by conventional economic theories. The relative weakness of the self-determination struggles in the Central tribal belt in comparison to the eastern frontier areas is not so much due to the internal reasons. One major reason may be that more than ninety per cent of the people in Nagaland or Mizoram were declared scheduled tribes which helped to consolidate themselves. In the central tribal belt on the contrary, only a part of the indigenous people were declared scheduled tribes and in addition each cultural zone was distributed among several states thus making the unity of the indigenous people a much more difficult process. The social scientists who almost invariably follow this official categorisation are accused today of being a part of this ideological subversion of the indigenous people by creating artificial ethnic division among them.

The majority of the social scientists do it unknowingly, and indeed, this has been a highly disturbing fact among the conscientious anthropologists—the one branch of social science

with the highest ethical standard. Following the outspoken criticism of traditional anthropology as the 'child of imperialism' by Kathleen Gough, there has been a rethinking about the anthropological studies in the Third World. The dilemma of conscience has been excellently described by Saudi Arabian Marxist anthropologist Talal Asad :

"...the scientific definition of anthropology as a disinterested (objective, value free) study of "other cultures" helped to mark off the anthropologist's enterprise from that of the trader, the missionary, the administrator,...but did it not also render him unable to envisage and argue for a radically different political future for the subordinate people he studied and thus serve to merge the enterprise *in effect* with that of dominant status-quo Europeans ?" Talal Asad, ed., *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, Ithaca, London, (1973 : 18).

Anthropology, a science based on the recognition of diversity, has been quick to grasp the distinct nature of the problems of the indigenous people from the general conditions in the Third World countries. For other branches of social sciences this has been more difficult. The normative critics of the development process (e.g. Ivan Illich, E. F. Schumacher) imply that the desirable pattern of development have to differ from community to community. But in absence of explicit recognition of diversities in conditions among the Third World people no analysis either of how the indigenous tribal people can also "outwit" the dominant communities within the Third World countries or what may be the requirements of "appropriate technologies" under the living conditions of these people has been developed. The radical critics either in the European Peace Research tradition (e.g. Johan Galtung) or the Latin American Dependency School (e.g. Andre Gunder Frank) with analytical thrust explaining underdevelopment as a creation of world economic system end up explaining that the internal situations too are *essentially* similar to the economic organization between the advanced "core" (metropolis) and the underdeveloped "peripheral" (satellites) countries. This may be essentially true ; nevertheless the state of ignorance remains. The world system framework underexplains such phenomena as

the devastation brought against the Amazonian tribes by the Brazilian government or the ruthless oppression of the New Guinea tribesmen by the ruling Javanese elite—both of which have created worldwide stir in the recent period. Observers feel that in many Third World areas, tribal minorities are more desperately at risk now than they were under colonial regimes. (Roger M. Keesing, *Cultural Anthropology: A Contemporary Perspective*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1981). A number of them have suggested that within the Third World itself, the oppressed ethnic minorities need to be considered separately as constituting a Fourth World ; merging them with the relatively developed Third World, may undermine the distinctive features of their problems.

Evidently, the Political Economy—which grew in the last two decades out of the condemnation of conventional economic theory as being unsuitable for explaining the realities of the underdeveloped countries—itself should come under scrutiny for its suitability in explaining the realities of the Fourth World as against the generalised concept of underdevelopment. It is quite possible that the social scientists, aware of the colonial heritage of the social science methods and the role of social science subjects as securing the dominant world economic order, reflect—being unaware—the interests of the dominant status-quo of the Third World metropolis. Indeed, in a note in 1975, Surajit Sinha had tried to call attention to this type of a problem and suggested :

“Indian anthropologists will have to seriously rethink about their frame of participation in research among the newly alerted indigenous people....But (such) awareness about the demand for playing a new role as social analysts is as yet a rare phenomenon among Indian anthropologists.” [“The ‘Native’ Hits Back”, *Miscellaneous Notes in Man in India*, 55 (1), March 1975 : pp. 81]

Anthropologists like Sinha are exceptions ; not all have been quick to realise the necessity of re-orientation. The comments above apply equally for development economists, policy planners, government administrators, social workers and

political activists, who however, are far less aware of the necessity.

In order to remove the bias within himself created by the dominant orders, the analyst, working among the indigeneous people, should "learn" from them. Yet, he is not without a role. Romanticisation of primitive ways of existence and cultural syndromes, has often resulted out of the "learning" process, whose justification may lie only in the researcher's taste for the exotic. The tribes of yesterday have come to stay in a modern world—be it to anybody's disapproval or not. The tribes people cannot survive for ever within the confines of Xingu Park (Brazil) sanctuaries. Anyone sincere to their interests should find out how they can exist within the modern world at their own terms. Distressed under the existing forces of the modern world, tribes have at times tried to escape from the realities. Yet, what is truly responsible for their distress is not "modernisation" but the subordination to the rationale of the dominant systems in the modern world. Of recent, Guinea-Bissau has drawn worldwide attention by demonstrating how the primitive tribes can be modernised under a distinct rationale and can cope with the modern world at their own advantages. The social scientists has a positive role here, a role in which he is not *in effect* a part of the dominant status quo.

The analytical process is not an easy one either. The depressed people are rarely able to articulate their own thought processes, leave alone their own choices of destination—and it requires tremendous amount of perseverance and perception on the part of the analyst to arrive at the truth. Very often certain interest groups among the indigeneous people, as the most vocal or easily accessible section, stand between their own people and the wider world as their interpreters (see in this connection Radha Kumar's article in this volume). The problem of articulation is partly solved if there exist a mass movement among the indigeneous people trying to define their choice of destination as well as developing methods as how to achieve it. The movements for self-determination therefore deserve special attention. Not only do those outline the ambitions and orientations more objectively, but also do that with a dimension

and depth, not envisaged by any research or government development programmes.

Although in the past two decades the struggles of the frontier tribes (e.g. Nagas, Mizos) were more intense, those are much less significant in numerical sense than the tribal movements of Jharkhand. As much as eighty-five percent of the scheduled tribe population in India, resides in the central tribal belt of the country, distributed among eight states, but concentrated in four cultural zones : Jharkhand (Bihar—West Bengal—(Orissa—M.P.), Gondwana (M.P. around Mandla), Bastar (M.P.—Orissa—Andhra—Maharashtra) and Bhilwara (Rajasthan—Gujrat—Maharashtra—M.P.). All these four regions account for a scheduled tribe population of between five (Bastar) and ten millions (Jharkhand) as against only half a million in Nagaland. The Jharkhand region does not only account for the largest tribal population in the country, it has also been leading the tribal politics in India. The regional autonomy movement in Jharkhand has the longest tradition ; Pan-tribal movement in the country was initiated from this region. The movements here have not been successful—but in course of the protracted and widespread struggle, the people of this region have been most successful among all the tribes in developing their own strategy for survival in the modern world. The purpose of this book is to outline this dynamics of the indigeneous people in Jharkhand, which may be the prototype of the Fourth World self-development in India.

A mass movement is a complex phenomenon consisting of a varieties of trends. Particular interest groups presume its content to be equated to their own interests. In orientation, parts of it may be revivalist and escapist. The attempt here is not to describe the different trends and draw a pen-picture of the movement, but to pinpoint the significant aspects of the movement—including even the nascent ones, which in due course may come to aid the people in their existence within the modern world. One of the most significant contribution to the experience acquired in the course of the struggle is the effort at unity among the communities residing in that area, including the communities which are not scheduled tribes. Accordingly, the discussions

in this book are not confined to the problems and movements of the scheduled tribes alone.

The book is divided in five sections. The first article in the introductory section gives a brief overview of the political economy and of the various currents within the movement. That the internal colonialism arises as a consequences of articulation of capitalism—which is indicated in the first article—is investigated further in a case study by Stuart Corbridge included in the same section.

The impoverisation of the indigeneous people as a consequence of this articulation process, is described in the second section : 'As it exists'. These facts have been noted by several other research studies and official reports and there is no need to repeat the details. However, even in matters of exploitation and oppression, the Fourth World way of perception may differ (though not necessarily). The three case studies included in this section relating to industry, agriculture and social life are selected in particular to highlight the distinct mode of perception. The phenomenon of bondage for example, is perceived by outsiders as an extremely primitive and drastic way of exploitation. But Mundle's study reveals, under the characteristic conditions in Palamau, "*the difference to the labourer between his miserable freedom and his miserable bondage is small.*" It is no wonder that the extensive measures adopted in recent years for the abolition of bondage in Palamau were regarded by the people as marginal and superficial development efforts. In Manmohan Pathak's story, the coal miner asks sarcastically why "smoking bidis had suddenly become dangerous". The cap lamp or the other safety measures are, to them, the whims of the *sahebs*; Dukhu Mandals die of accidents, and for reasons against which no preventive measure is ever taken. The third study in this section is an effort at depicting the distinct outlook towards marriage, concubinage and prostitution. In addition, all the three studies indicate the increasing destitution. Accidents in mines, bondage in rural areas, prostitution in industrial centres—these are the contributions of the development process for the people.

The third and the fourth sections : 'Basis of unity' and 'Achievements', describe the dimensions and the depth respectively, of the current phase of the movement. The unity is still in the process of making and the passing scene in Jharkhand is a continuing dialogue among different groups involved to find out the basis of unity. The first two articles in section three are parts of the dialogue. Both Basant Kumar Mehta and A. K. Jha, among many others belonging to that region—have propagated the views that the notified scheduled tribes alone are not all the indigeneous people in this region and that historically this region was well advance in the process of being a uni-language community. Such suggestions, widespread in Jharkhand today, are the ones which make the local elites accuse the established trends in social science research, as effectively disrupting their internal unity and distorting their histories and cultural milieu. The brief notes included here, prepared by Sri Mehta and Sri Jha will indicate beyond doubt that these suggestions are at least as much scientific as the contradictory claims of the established trends in the research world.

The third article, that by Patna-based journalist Arun Sinha, included in this section gives an intrinsic view of the basis of political unity in Jharkhand. While historical commonness of the people or the existence of a lingua franca are considered essential for the emergence of a nationality, the unique feature of Jharkhand movement is that it also includes at times immigrant workers in the fold of the regional movement. The widespread dialogue about the attitudes towards immigrant workers, and the attitude of such workers about the regional movement is discussed in several other papers. It is also an important international debate. Sinha's article, therefore, does not indicate the arguments in the debate as in the articles of Jha and Mehta. Rather, he concentrates on the fundamentals, and by analysing the characteristics of regional political economy concludes that the unitary trend between workers and peasants in Jharkhand have more potentiality to develop.

The two articles in the fourth section describe the achievements in developments of language-literature and socio-economic conditions by way of self-help. The two articles, apart

from indicating the extent and orientation are also instructives. Dr. Keshari in his article has also indicated what further steps may be taken for the developments of Jharkhandi languages and literatures. Maharaj and Iyer analyses the traditional social organisation but with the purpose as how those may come to aid the people in their process of fitting in the modern world. In both the articles the gap between the government development efforts and the self-efforts of the people are noticeable.

Some clarification is necessary about the styles of the articles included. Here too a utilitarian rather than a conventional approach is made. The inclusion of a case study following the commentary, in section one is done with a purpose to provide an in-depth view of the developments. Since the subject of section two—as has already been indicated—has been extensively studied, for inclusion in the present volume, I have selected three articles from the already existing literature. As options were available, in the selection here brevity and readability too have been considered as criteria. Articles in section three may not be considered as exhaustive research articles. The merits of such works like those of Mehta or Jha should not be judged from here as the authors have not been able to describe their arguments in details in the limited space available. For the purpose of this book—it should be noted—the existence, not the evaluation of such works are important. The scope of this book is limited—to help recognise the distinct nature of the problem. Such aspects like re-evaluation of history, development of a link language or outlining the methods of worker-peasant alliance, in the approach of this book can only get indicated as the avenues of further research for Jharkhandis and the outsider scholars who may be interested to work for the cause of the Fourth World. The two articles included in section four are of course, exhaustive studies within their respective scopes. The extensive participation of the people in the process of awakening, that is described in these two articles, actually complement the orientations described in section three—which may otherwise seem sporadic.

All the different aspects of the current dynamics of Jharkhand are not exhausted within the scope of the present study

Yet certain trends may be noticed. In the last section—'Whither Jharkhand'—we have tried to evaluate the current dynamics. Such evaluations may be made from various points of views. The three articles included in this section evaluates the Jharkhand movement from three different angles. Identity and outlook of people arises from production relations; but the correspondence may occur only in the final analysis. In the current context various contradictory traits are noticed even among the most advanced sections. By the interplay of these traits the Jharkhand movement of today may develop along anyone of the several alternative courses in the future. The three articles included in the concluding section do not only enumerate the alternatives open to the movement but also indicate the conditions of their development.

Whether one agrees with all of our observations and conclusions or not, it is hoped that this book will help in appreciating the necessity of an altogether different approach in both developmental efforts and social science research among the indigenous people. The world that has seen enough of paternalism and that is striving to meet both basic human needs and essential demands for dignity and equality, the issue of how the outsiders and their works relate to the people has now become more sensitive than in the past.

Patna
Oct., 1982

Nirmal Sengupta

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Jharkhand Question*

NIRMAL SENGUPTA

Ever since the East India Company penetrated into the hilly and forested region, bordering Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, there were several popular revolts. The tribal revolts, like the Kol Rebellion, the Santhal Rebellion or the Birsa Movement, are well-known. Other revolts like the Chuar Rebellion or Ganga Narain Rebellion—the less discussed ones—were participated mostly by the non-tribals, but were comparable in magnitude to the tribal revolts. There was one feature common to all these revolts—they were all directed specifically against outsiders. Over this area the exploiters were almost invariably outsiders. The correspondence was so vivid that the tribal word *diku* came to mean both 'exploiter' and 'outsider'; the second one being the derivative meaning. The nineteenth century popular revolts in this area were specifically directed against the *dikus*, which functionally meant 'a group of outsider-exploiter'. Depending on the local and temporal characteristics of the majority of exploiters and oppressors, the connotation of the term has changed from time to time. Consequently no satisfactory and undisputed definition is available. Broadly speaking, the term used to mean originally the zamindars or their employees who were non-tribals, generally Bengalis, when this area was a part of Bengal province. Later it meant non-tribals of the upper class. At

*Part of this article has appeared in *Economic and Political Weekly*, XV (14), April 5, 1980.

present it means 'the people of North Bihar', 'those who come from the other side of the Ganga', 'those who earn their living here and send their earnings out to their own homes in Bihar.'¹ However, the agitated peasant knows his enemy in person. The broader grammatical meaning of *diku* would rarely misguide him in choosing his 'target' during any spontaneous agitation. But the situation becomes complicated when the question of a regular political organisation or a formal programme comes up. To the ideologists the question is an extremely tricky one. On the one hand, wrong identification of *diku* is sure to lead to ideological equipping of unwarranted antagonism. On the other hand, failure to recognise the regional characteristics, associated with the process of class exploitation, results into hackneyed formulations, unable to generate popular enthusiasm.² Every political party operating over this region was caught in this dilemma. The Jharkhand parties which enjoy massive popularity, frequently use the term *diku* in a purely xenophobic non-class sense. The all India parties, including the Communist parties, disregard the phenomenon and in consequence are not able to generate much popular enthusiasm. Only in a while, one tries to keep a balance, e.g. the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha. But that is rather easier said than done. After all, the path of truth is like a razor's edge.

The Evolution of a Concept

Where the oppressor is characterised as outsider the oppressed must be one who is 'local'. But that is only a *juxtaposed identity* with respect to the concept of *diku*. The search for a *self-identity* of the exploited and oppressed in this area, has proved to be a difficult task. As long as class struggles were

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1. S. C. Sinha, Jyoti Sen, Sudhir Panchbhai, "The Concept of Diku Among The Tribes of Chotanagpur", *Man in India*, April-June, 1969.
 2. A. K. Roy, M.P.,—the charismatic trade union leader of Dhanbad narrated an interesting episode. From its inception *Jharkhand Mukti Morcha* is celebrating *Jharkhand Diwas* each year on the fourth day of the month of February. The number of participants in the first two years were about five thousands. After the introduction of the Green Flag since 1972 the meetings attracted mammoth gatherings.

waged by one or only a handful of communities together, the individual community identities would have served the purpose. The need for a well-defined regional/sub-national self-identity became acute in the twentieth century when the multi-community organisations like Chotanagpur Unnati Samaj (1915) or Adivasi Mahasabha (1938) were formed. The name Jharkhand³ was used in this context for the first time in 1938—more than a hundred years after the emergence of the concept of *diku*. Then, and even now, it is an extremely amorphous concept. The various levels of understanding the concept of *Jharkhandi*, range from such absolutely non-class definition as 'the adivasis (tribals) of Chotanagpur-Santbal Parganas'⁴ to such absolutely non-xenophobic definition as 'a producer, irrespective of caste, tribe or nation, residing in the Jharkhand region'.⁵ In the demand for autonomy, the boundary of Jharkhand has been defined as extending over the districts of Chotanagpur and Santbal Parganas. The socio-cultural unity on the other hand, is conceived over a wider area including certain adjacent districts of West Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh.⁶ Outside the informed circle there exist two very serious misconceptions about the nature of the current Jharkhand movement. First, that is a movement by the tribal people for a land of their own. Second, that the only significant content of the movement is to establish an autonomous state. As early as in 1938, the Adivasi Mahasabha—straighten the predecessor of Jharkhand Party (1950)—had extended its membership to non-tribals; and at present the

3. From time to time the name 'Jharkhand' was attributed to this and that administrative regions in this area. But the reference to such a sub-nation was made as late as in 1938.

—K. L. Sharma, "Jharkhand Movement in Bihar", *Eco. and Political Weekly*, January 19, 1976.

4. For example see even the recently published work of Myron Weiner, *Sons of the Soil*, Oxford, 1978.

5. The programme of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha—K. G. Iyer and R. N. Maharaj, *Agrarian Movement in Dhanbad*, National Labour Institute, New Delhi, 1977. f. n. 160, pp. 129–30.

6. See the Memorandum submitted by Jharkhand Party to State Reorganisation Committee, Also referred to in K. L. Sharma, op. cit.

non-tribal Jharkhandis constitute a major part of the Jharkhand movement.⁷ In fact, the process of cultural assertion by the development of regional languages and attempts to find cultural homogeneity of the people here⁸ began earlier, particularly since the late sixties. The autonomy demand is only a part of the Jharkhand movement.

The peculiar history of human settlements in this region—a history full of incidences of migration—make the identification of original inhabitants (*autochthons*) very difficult. In the past, one tribe was frequently compelled to leave its abode, and was driven further east by another tribe. Non-tribal migrants came here both as fortune-seekers and in search of sanctuaries, to escape from feudal oppression in the plain lands of Bengal, Orissa, Bihar and even further west. Yet the original inhabitants were certainly not just a collection of distinctly identifiable closed group of people. Long years of close contact had brought the language, culture and even the social structure of the different people closer to one another. To some extent, a cultural homogeneity is noted over large parts of Chotanagpur, although that is not enough to make appear a distinct nationality. In addition, the bordering regions in particular and the whole area in general have remained for long under the cultural and religious influences of the broader society in the Gangetic plain. Hindu, Muslim and even Christian religious influences; the impacts of Bengali and Bihari cultures, and later that of modernisation have achieved considerable success in transforming the inhabitants of this area and mould their ways of lives to those of the mainstream of Indian society. The Santhals for example, are not as homogeneous as it appears from the well defined list of Scheduled Tribes. Occupationally they are not forest-based primitives, but are efficient cultivators. By religion many of them are Hindus. A sizeable section of them refer to Bengali or Hindi as their mother-tongue. Socially they do not live lives segregated

7. In fact at present every group that demand separate Jharkhand has both tribals and non-tribals as participants. Among the leaders there are many important non-tribal leaders.

8. For example see *Reports of Jharkhand Regional Intellectual Conference*, Ranchi, May 6-7, 1978. Also published in *Shalpatra*, Ranchi No. 4, 1978.

from other communities in this region.⁹ Some other tribes have been transformed more, e.g. Kurmi Mahatos or Bauris who were identified as semi-tribals even during the late nineteenth century,¹⁰ are not included in Scheduled Tribes at present. On the other hand, tribes such as Paharias are distinctly primitive and have been very little transformed by outside influences.

The official list of Scheduled Tribes therefore, is miles away from indicating the original inhabitants (*adivasis*). The Mahatos for example became known as 'Kurmi Mahatos' and came to be recognised as 'Kurmis' as late as in 1929. Long before that the All India Kurmi Mahasabha was formed and the Kurmis of Gangetic U.P. and Bihar had established good caste-brotherhood with Marathas, Patidars or Okkaligas residing far away from Bihar. Conversely many Mahatos had identified the Bihari Kurmi culture as an alien culture, and a movement called *Gossaiyan* movement had taken root at Chotanagpur aiming to prevent such assimilation with the alien culture Hinduism.¹¹ The movement did not last long under climate where tribalism was associated with inferior status, and the Mahatos began practising 'Kurmi-ism' so much, that their social reform organisation in the seventies was named *Shivaji Samaj* from Shivaji—the champion of the Maratha caste. The Jharkand movement has once again raised the tribal identity to a position of prestige. Recently, the Mahatos have started demanding their inclusion into the Scheduled Tribes' list¹²—a demand which was not raised earlier, in spite of the fact that the government extends many special privileges to Scheduled

9. In fact with several Hindu castes, residing in the region from ancient times, many tribes have developed symbiotic relationship to such extent that those castes have become part and parcel of the tribal social set up e.g. in S. C. Roy, *The Oraons of Chotanagpur*, Ranchi 1915, pp. 116.

10. Col. E. T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethology of Bengal*, 1972, Calcutta, pp. 317-320.

11. K. K. Verma, *Changing Role of Caste Association, A Case Study of Kurmi Sabhas*, National Publishing House, New Delhi (in press).

12. e.g. Memorandum submitted to Parliamentary Secretary by President, Chotanagpur Kurmi Panch Association.

—*Jharkhand Times*, Ranchi, January 21-29, 1970.

Tribes. The new wave of cultural assertion is not peculiar to Mahatos. The Santhals have developed a script, called *Olchiki*¹³ for Santhali, Ho and Mundari languages. A section of them today objects to the use of Roman, Bengali or Devnagri scripts for writing in tribal languages. More and more Santhals are declaring their mother-tongue as Santhali. The number of persons declaring *Sadani* (*Sadri*), *Khortha*, *Nagpuria* and such other local dialects as their mother-tongue have shot up in recent period. All these languages were variously classified as dialects of Hindi, Bengali or Oriya and the speakers themselves were reluctant to consider those as distinct languages. Today there is an extensive effort to develop various languages and dialects spoken in Jharkhand. Ranchi University has started regular courses in a few of these languages.

The same trend is also noticeable among the one-time immigrants who were never tribals. In various degrees they have been integrated with the nascent culture and society of Jharkhand. Many of them speak the local dialects, which were often very close to their original dialects. They, in turn have influenced the course of development of that regional culture. In fact, excepting a few numerically strong and politically important castes and communities in Jharkhand about whose origin some research works were undertaken by the administrator-anthropologists like Dalton or Risley during the colonial rule — practically nothing is known about the origin of other castes. They might have come from tribal stock or they might be Hindu migrants. Earlier they preferred to imagine that their ancestors were outsiders adding thereby 'respectability' to their origins. Today, many of them like to think that their ancestors were residing here all along. The comparatively recent immigrants remember the history all right. But they are not eager any more to claim superior status by such an origin and refrain from remaining conspicuously outsiders by their manners and ways of lives. On the whole, the present Jharkhand upsurge has begun as a conscious attempt at assimilation

13. The script was developed at northern Orissa by Raghunath Murmu, an adivasi scholar. The Santhals are fairly advanced and prosperous cultivators in Orissa.

of all the 'local' people of this area.

In such an attempt at assimilation the Jharkhandi intellectuals are also engaging themselves in finding points of closeness among the languages, cultural patterns and social practices found all over Jharkhand.¹⁴ Their attempts may not be completely fruitless because the different communities in Jharkhand have lived in close contacts with one another for several centuries. Some degree of commonness was noted by Dalton, Risley and others. The possibility that they have exaggerated the differences between the communities to some extent, due to their limited understanding or even by intention, cannot be excluded. After all, the people of this area had offered severe resistance to British ascendancy, and the policy of 'divide and rule' was a well-applied policy of British administration. The anthropological research in this region had begun because of administrative needs. We have still to wait for knowing whether the emergence of nascent Jharkhand sub-nationality was thwarted at that time and whether the current attempt at finding such an identity succeeds.

The Jharkhandis in Jharkhand

The Jharkhand area has been described to include many other districts outside Bihar. The discussion here will be confined to the districts of Bihar alone. Out of the 31 districts of Bihar only 7 are included in Jharkhand. But these seven districts constitute almost half of the total geographical area of the State. Being a plateau with extensive hills and forests, the area is not densely populated. Only a quarter of the total population of Bihar resides in this area. However, there is one feature which characterises the Jharkhandi population. Nearly half of the total Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes population of the state resides in this region.

14. e.g. Sitaram, *Bharat Me Rashtriya Prashna Aur Adivasion Ke Rashtra Ki Samasya*, (in Hindi), People's Front, Katrasgarh (Dhanbad), 1975.

Biseshwar Prasad Keshari, "Hamari Kshetriya Bhashaon ke Sangharsh Ki Dishaen", *Shalpatra*, Dhanbad, No. 3, 1977.

TABLE 1

A comparison between Jharkhand and the rest of Bihar

	<i>Jharkhand</i>	<i>Rest of Bihar</i>
1. Geographical area, as per cent of state total	46	54
2. Total population	1.42 crores	4.21 crores
3. —as per cent of total state population	25	75
4. Population of Scheduled Castes	14 lakhs	55 lakhs
5. Population of Scheduled Tribes	46 lakhs	4 lakhs
6. Total Scheduled Castes and Tribes population as per cent of population of that region.	42	16

Source : Census, 1971.

Such is the distinct characteristics of the Jharkhandi population. The official list of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is definitely not sufficient for indicating the destitutes—more so in Jharkhand area where many of the backward castes were tribals in the past and even today are less capable than their counterparts in the Bihar plains to cope with the shrewdness of the class societies. The majority of the Mahatos are as poor and as simple as the Santhals. The Bhuinyas, who contribute the bulk of the bonded labourers in Palamau district, are not considered as a Scheduled community in the adjacent district of Hazaribagh.¹⁵ The Momins among the Muslims were once the

15. As per notification issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

enslaved artisans¹⁶ and even today are as poor and as depressed as the Scheduled Castes. None of these people finds any place in the government list of Scheduled communities. In spite of that the Scheduled Castes and Tribes account for 42 per cent of the population of this region. Therefore, the concept of Jharkhand is not merely a geographic region. Its real implication is 'a land of depressed people'. 'Jharkhandi' means 'a mass of destitutes', and the 'development of Jharkhand' is a question of 'development of the conditions of destitute population'. What is being done in that direction ?

Jharkhand is developing fast ; but not the Jharkhandis. Chotanagpur and Santhal Parganas together account for only a fortieth part (2.5 per cent) of the total geographical area of the country. But more than a fourth part of the total mining activities in the country is performed in this small region alone. Nearly a fifth part of the total public sector investments in industrial activities is located in this region. In the private sector, besides the TISCO and TELCO factories of the Tatas, there are several big, medium and small industrial units located in this region. The Aluminium factory at Muri, Copper plant at Ghatshila, Lead Smelter at Tundoo, Uranium mining at Jadugoda and Mica industry at Giridih have strategic importance. Other important industrial activities include Cement, Bricks and Tiles and Glass and Glassware production, in each of which the production in the region account for almost the whole of the production in Bihar State.

Beginning from 1894—the year in which railway connection was established with Jharia coalfields¹⁷—the growth of mining activities in this region has been spectacular. The Steel plant at Jamshedpur was constructed a few years later. Since the 'fifties the works of the Damodor Valley Corporation, the Fertiliser plant at Sindri, the Heavy Engineering factory at Ranchi and

16. See the discussion about "hellot weaver caste" and their conversion into Islam in E.T. Dalton, *op. cit.*, pp. 324–5.

17. Since the extension of railway connections reached Giridih much earlier than Jharia, coal mining in Jharkhand had begun in Giridih much earlier. But the spectacular growth began only when Jharia coalfields came into operation.

TABLE 2
Production of Minerals, 1970
(in value)

Sl. No.	Name of Mineral	All India Value (Rs. lakhs)	Total Production As per cent of total mineral production	Per cent Jharkhand	Produced at Rest of Bihar
1.	Copper	374.8	0.77	100.0	nil
2.	Kyanite	261.1	0.54	85.0	nil
3.	Quartzite	16.0	0.03	60.5	5.3
4.	Mica (crude)	201.4	0.41	58.5	neg.
5.	Asbestos	21.1	0.04	53.0	nil
6.	Apatite	9.8	0.02	48.6	nil
7.	Coal	29292.7	54.27	44.5	nil
8.	Sand	10.4	0.02	37.3	nil
9.	Fireclay	44.8	0.09	33.0	neg.
10.	Bauxite	174.6	0.36	32.4	nil
11.	Chinaclay (processed)	84.1	0.17	28.7	nil
12.	Iron Ore	3680.1	7.59	22.4	nil
13.	Limestone	2302.3	4.75	3.7	7.5
14.	Manganese Ore	771.9	1.59	0.6	nil
15.	Pyrite	56.3	0.12	nil	100.0
16.	Other Minerals	12733.9	26.28	—4.37—	
Total		48447.6	100.00	27.77*	0.47*

f n.—*figure excludes value worth 1.15 per cent accountable by other minerals produced in Bihar for which the distribution between Jharkhand and the rest of Bihar is not readily available.

Source : *Indian Minerals Year Book, 1970.*

the giant Steel plant at Bokaro have been the landmarks in the development of this region. The number of towns in Chotanagpur-Santhal Parganas region has increased from 13 in 1901 to 34 in 1951 and then to 96 in 1971. There are very few areas in the country which are developing as fast.

But who benefits from this development ?

Out of a total of two lakh eighty thousand quarters constructed throughout the country for workers in the public sector projects,¹⁸ no less than sixty thousand are located in this small region alone. But look deeper into that picture of prosperity. The different localities in the Bokaro Steel city bear the names of districts of Gangetic Bihar and U.P. (e.g. *Arrah More*, *Chhapra More*, *Halia More* etc.) ; Hazaribagh, Giridih and Daltongunjies are conspicuously absent. Look into the payroll of the Steel plant. The same facts are repeated.

In a nutshell this is the crux of the problem. The lion's share of the developmental benefits are taken away by the immigrant outsiders. During the past one hundred years, there has been more than four times increase in the total population of this region. Immigration accounts for a large part of this increase. In the ten years between 1951 and 1961, the number of Punjabis in this region have increased from 30 thousand to 57 thousand, Marwaris from 8 to 22 thousand, Gujratis from 8 to 18 thousand, Telugu speakers from 18 to 36 thousand and Tamilians from 6 to 15 thousand.¹⁹ Since Hindi, Urdu, Bengali and Oriya are included in the mother-tongues of the original inhabitants

18. *Annual Report of the Working of Industrial and Commercial Undertakings of the Central Government*, vol. 1, 1973-74.

19. Source : Table D-I-(i)—Mother-Tongue, Part II-A Tables, vol. V—Bihar, *Census*, 1951, and Table C-V, Mother-Tongue, in Part II-C, Social and Cultural Tables, vol. IV, Bihar, *Census*, 1961.

During the next ten years after 1961 the number of persons with mother-tongue, Punjabi have increased from 56 to 64 thousand, Gujrati from 18 to 21 thousand, Malayalam from 6 to 11 thousand. Persons with Telegu and Tamil as their mother-tongues—have decreased from 36 to 32 and from 15 to 14 thousand respectively.

— Source : State Tables, C-V-A, Distribution of languages, part II-C (i), Social Cultural Tables, Series, 1, All India, *Census*, 1971.

of this area, it is not possible to ascertain the number of migrants from these regions (West Bengal, Bihar, M.P., U.P., Orissa etc.) from the available data. In the 1961 Census, data was collected also in respect of different dialects of the major languages. According to that data the number of persons who mentioned *Bhojpuri* as their mother-tongue were 113 thousand, *Malithali* 16 thousand, *Chhattishgrahi* 9 thousand and *Bilaspuri* 2 thousand. Many other immigrants from regions speaking those dialects had mentioned Hindi as their mother-tongue. However, some idea about the rate of immigration from different areas may be obtained from these data.

According to the available statistics about the 'place of birth', 8.9 per cent of the population enumerated in Jharkhand in the 1961 Census was born outside this area.²⁰ In 1951 the proportion was less than 5.5 per cent.²¹ In 1961 as high as 25 per cent of the people enumerated in Dhanbad district and 13 per cent of those enumerated in Singhbhum district were born outside Jharkhand (Chotanagpur-Santhal Parganas only) area. Out of all, those born outside Jharkhand but enumerated within Jharkhand 40 per cent were born in other districts of Bihar and the rest 60 per cent were born outside Bihar. No wonder the nineteenth century connotation of *diku* as the *Bengali Mahajan* has now come to mean 'those who come from the other side of the Ganga'.

Since 1961, for which the data is available the situation has worsened considerably. The total urban population in Jharkhand area has increased from 13 lakhs in 1961 to 23 lakhs in 1971; and has almost definitely exceeded 30 lakhs at present, after 1971. The pace of immigration has not matched with this rate of urbanisation but has been disproportionately higher after 1961. The condition of work in mines and industries has improved considerably during this period making it more attractive to the outsiders. Competition from the outsiders has increased and the Jharkhandis are losing grounds progressively.

20. Source : Appendix of Table D-II, Inter-District Migration, Part II-D. Migration Tables, vol. IV. Bihar. *Census-1961*. The relevant data for 1971 Census has not yet been published.

21. Source ; Table D-IV, Migrants, Part II-A Tables, Vol. V. Bihar, *Census*, 1951.

The competition is not necessarily fair. In a single week following the nationalisation of coal mines in 1971, nearly fifty thousand Jharkhandi miners lost their jobs²² and were replaced by people mainly from Bhojpur region. Several thousands (people say 30 thousands) of telegrams were sent from Dhanbad district alone to people at Arrah-Balia-Chapra informing that jobs were available. During the Emergency thousands were retrenched by underhand means. With rare exception they were adivasis or harijans.²³ In the initial years of the history of coal mines, when conditions of work were almost inhumane, the local adivasis and harijans were the only ones engaged in the mining works. Since then conditions have 'developed' in such a way that the Jharkhandi miner has almost become an extinct category.

The Deprived of Development

An approximate idea may be had about the composition of population in the area from the information above.

- (a) Immigrants from outside the Jharkhand region account for around 10 to 15 per cent of total population i. e. about 15 to 20 lakhs in number.
- (b) As per 1971 Census the Scheduled Tribe and Caste Population accounted for 42 per cent of the total population—rarely one was immigrant.
- (c) The rest 42 to 48 per cent population too are Jharkhandis (autochthons)—those who are neither included in Scheduled Castes nor in Scheduled Tribes. In Chotanagpur they are called *Sadani*, *Nagpuria* etc. from the various dialects spoken by them as their mother-tongue. For the sake of simplicity let us call these people (Jharkhandis other than Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) *Sadanis*.*

*Throughout the later sections of this article the name "Sadani" has been used in this sense. The reader must be forewarned that in its actual use, "Sadani" indicates only a particular group among all the Jharkhandi communities even after excluding the Scheduled ones.

22. Such claims appear to be near the truth. I have noted it elsewhere—N. Sengupta, *The Destitute and Development: A study of the Bauri Community in Bokaro region*, Delhi, 1979.

23. List of hundreds of such retrenched workers submitted to the C. L. authorities by A. K. Roy, M. P. in June, 1977 confirm this fact.

Detailed breakdown of occupational categories showing distinctly the proportion of Jharkhandis to outsiders employed in different occupations is not available. In order to provide a rough idea the proportion of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes—most of whom are *Jharkhandis*—in the different non-agricultural occupations is shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3
Workers Engaged in Industrial Categories,
Jharkhand—1971

Sl. No.	Industrial Category.	No. of Workers		S.C. and S.T. as % of total workers.
		Total	S. Castes & S. Tribes.	
1.	Mining and Quarrying*	2,50,104	79,912	32
2.	Household Industry	1,12,295	40,151	36
3.	Other than h.h. Ind.	2,13,748	43,241	20
4.	Construction	42,275	10,500	25
5.	Trade & Commerce	1,45,100	6,781	5
6.	Transport etc.	1,02,620	23,815	23
7.	Other Services	2,45,026	65,131	27

* Share of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have been reduced drastically after the nationalisation of coal mines in 1971, after the Census was over.

Source : 1971 Census.

The disproportionately low representation of members of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, who comprise 42 per cent of the population, is evident. Separate statistics for Sadanis are not available ; but that too would have confirmed the same picture of deprivation.

The sector where the Scheduled population finds its highest representation is household and cottage industries. The types of jobs are weaving or woodcutting—by no means modern ones. Till 1971 they found substantial openings in the mining and quarrying sector, as long as its major industry, coal mining, was

demanding hard labour at low wages. Today the representation has surely come down far below than what has been shown in Table—3 relating to pre-nationalisation data. In sectors like the manufacturing industries, construction, or transport, representation is much less than what could have been justifiable. In trade and commerce, the Scheduled Castes and Tribes practically do not have any share.

Sadanis—Many of whom are the more enlightened communities than the Scheduled Castes and Tribes among the Jharkhandis—are probably not so much removed from trade and commercial activities. But probably they are worse off than the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in certain other sectors—for they do not enjoy any privileges in job reservation etc. and are required to compete with outsiders seeking jobs in modern industries. In reality, however, the Sadanis are rarely treated on equal footing with outsiders by the employing authorities, many of whom come from outside. In addition, many of the Sadanis belong to higher castes and unlike the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, are averse to hard manual jobs. In consequence, they find less representation than even the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, in such activities like mining and quarrying.

Judging from these indications, it may not be a gross underestimate to say that the Jharkhandis—Sadanis and Scheduled ones together—find themselves employed in only about a half of the employment opportunities opened up in the area by large-scale development activities that characterise the region. No doubt, the government has a policy even in this region to favour the “sons of the soil”. But what has officially been recognised as the meaning of the word in industries like the Bokaro Steel is, “anyone who has received education for at least one year in the state of Bihar”.²⁴ Thus, by the rules, people from Chas and Champaran are *equally* privileged “sons of the soil” in the eyes of the administration. In reality, however, the privileges differ. The latter have their kinsmen as employing authorities—a Jharkhandi officer is rare. Naturally the Jharkhandis today demand separation from Bihar state so as to leave no confusion about the “sons of the soil”.

24. Sengupta, *op. cit.*

Jharkhand region has registered one of the fastest rate of urban growth. But who lives in the towns? Out of the total urban population in Jharkhand areas, only 17 per cent were Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, according to the 1971 Census. The Sadanis may account for a slightly higher proportion. But it is doubtful whether all the Jharkhandis together will account for even a half of the total urban population. That explains why the localities in Bokaro Steel city bear the names of districts in Gangetic Bihar and U.P.

The ten per cent (roughly speaking) immigrants in Jharkhand appropriate more than fifty per cent of the industrial jobs. But to say so is really a statistical jugglery. The Jharkhandis benefit from the development of Jharkhand region in the same manner as the growth of slums are also included in urban development. Among the urban population, the Jharkhandis are predominantly slum-dwellers, the immigrants being the prosperous urban folk. In Industrial employment, unskilled workers are the Jharkhandis and well-paid workers are outsiders. The officers come from North Bihar, their orderlies may be Jharkhandis. The contractors are outsiders, the labourers are recruited locally. The small *Pan* shop owner is a Jharkhandi, the big traders and merchants are Punjabis, Gujratis or Marwaris. The professionals are outsiders, the maid-servants' job is a monopoly of the Jharkhandis. As long as the miners' job was a low-paid unregulated job, the Jharkhandis had some pie. But when, after the nationalisation the wage rates increased almost twice, they ceased to be the beneficiaries.

Even the insignificant share of developmental benefits which they receive today would not have accrued to them had not the Jharkhandis struggled relentlessly for these. In order to receive some amount of compensation, hundreds of adivasi families displaced from the land acquired for the construction of the Heavy Engineering Plant at Ranchi, had to wage militant struggle for several years.²⁵ The displaced families at Bokaro had kept the Administrative Building of the Steel plant encircled

25. Three massive demonstrations were organised before the H. E. C. office in January, 1962, May 1967 and January 1970.

(*gherao*) for three consecutive days in 1969. Only after that, the Steel plant authorities announced policy to reserve the grade-IV services for them. Even recently, in April 1978, four Jharkhandi villagers—tribals and non-tribals—laid down their lives, while defending the rights of their brothers, from encroachment of their land requisitioned by the government for the site of Subarnarekha Hydel Project scheme.

It is true that Damodar, Subarnarekha or Koel-Karo projects, with their capacities to produce thousands of Megawatts of electricity, facilitate the development of the country. But whose development? The Jharkhand area, comprising half of Bihar State and only 2.5 per cent of the whole country, produced 90 per cent and 7 per cent of total electricity generated in Bihar and India respectively—even if it is overlooked that the coal produced in this region is the source of thermal power in many other electricity generating units all over the country. To make another statistical point, the per capita consumption of electricity in Jharkhand region is possibly the highest in the country. But developmental benefits in Jharkhand are not enjoyed by the Jharkhandis. The consumption is appropriated by the industries and urban people alone. The proportion of villages electrified in Jharkhand region is one of the lowest in the country.

TABLE 4

Consumption of electricity in Jharkhand and other areas

Region	Per capita consumption of electricity. 1972-73, (KWH)	Proportion of village electrified till March 31, 1973
Jharkhand	204.4	5.0
Rest of Bihar	19.5	20.1
All India	96.3	27.3*

*Till March 31, 1974

Source: Bihar State Electricity Board

Why should not the Jharkhandis oppose the construction of the Koel-Karo project? If it is to bring prosperity that is meant for others! For the Jharkhandis it has relevance only in the eviction of thousands of agricultural families from their homes; it is a notorious fact that the promised compensations in money and employment, are never easily obtained. People in the adjoining villages to these power plants may not in all likelihood see electric lamps even after completion of the project. The peasants in the villages near the gigantic Sindri Fertilizer factory have rarely used fertilisers. The women of Chandwa village have to go far off to get some drinking water, although the water-supply station for Ranchi town has been constructed on their once-cultivated land.²⁶ Over large parts of Jharkhand the paddy fields have been destroyed, the coal has been taken away—leaving dark black holes of abandoned pits to symbolise the destiny of Jharkhand.

By their repeated revolts in the nineteenth century, the adivasis had won for themselves sanctions for protective land legislations under the British administration. The legislations continue, but the dead weight of industrial impact and rapid advance of commercialisation make the effects little felt. During the first three Five Year Plans, more than 50 thousand Scheduled Tribes and 10 thousand Scheduled Caste families were uprooted from their ancestral homes to make land available for the construction of Public sector industrial projects alone.²⁷ The total number of displaced families was much higher if we consider the private sector industries and remember that coal mines at the time of this enumeration were in the private sector. The progress of land acquisition for industrial purposes has remained high in the more recent period when the gigantic projects like Bokaro Steel or Patratu and Tenughat Super Thermal Power plants have been added. The newly proposed ones

26. R. O. Dhan, *Problems of Land Alienation in the District of Ranchi*, Tribal Research Inst., Ranchi, 1974 (mimeo).

27. M. L. Patel, *Changing Land Problems of Tribal India*, Bhopal, 1974. The data given is for the whole of Bihar State. However, excluding the smaller projects, all Public sector projects in Bihar are located in Jharkhand.

include for example Koel-Karo project threatening to destroy 200 villages and submerge 45,000 acres of agricultural land after the construction of a reservoir.

While there may be some justifications in terms of national interest for such alienation, there is none whatsoever to support the massive cases of alienation by landlords, speculators or even by common outsiders, making a mockery of the protective land laws. At Lohardaga town for example, 78 per cent of Scheduled Tribe families were alienated from their lands by way of mortgages.²⁸ The Scheduled Castes and Sadanis are easier prey because unlike the Scheduled Tribes they do not enjoy any legal protection in matters of land alienation. From the outskirts of Bokaro Steel city the Scheduled Castes have been driven away within the last few years by means which can aptly be described as savage.²⁹ It is true that the problem is most acute in the towns and urban peripheries, where land prices have hiked up. However, twelve urban agglomerations and fifty single towns, along with numerous industrial villages, block headquarters and marketing centres, strewn throughout the Jharkhand region make urban influences felt on land markets over wide areas. In Jharkhand there are 62 acres of urban area per 1000 acres under cultivation³⁰—leaving alone many other settlements not classified as urban in the Census. In addition, the effect of industrialisation extends even to remote rural areas by peculiar ways. For example, many of those workers retrenched during the nationalisation of coal mines were compelled to sell their lands held in villages, in order to survive during the period of unemployment. In a remote village Jayhtara, in Dhanbad district, it was found during a study conducted in 1976 that each single Scheduled Caste family who had some land, had sold at least a part of that during the five years period after the nationalisation of coal mines. Since agricultural labour was in abundant supply after the retrenched miners had gone back to the villages, the landlords of that village resolved to cut

28. R. O. Dhan, *op. cit.*

29. Sengupta, *op. cit.*

30. As per 1971 Census.

down the already meagre wage rates of agricultural labourers.³¹ On October 31, 1978 in a raid for arresting the petty thieves, police had opened fire at Jayhtara, killing four old men belonging to the Scheduled Castes.

The Collapse of the Traditional Modes of Livelihood

The majority of the Jharkhandi communities, like the peasants everywhere, are strongly attached to agriculture and their traditional modes of living. Even after so much of industrialisation in Jharkhand area, the Oraons, with only 5 per cent of their total population living in towns, rank the highest among the Scheduled Tribes in the degree of urbanisation. Among the Santhals, the most numerous Scheduled Tribe, 99 per cent of population still lives in villages. Some of the Scheduled Castes, e.g., Dusadh, Bauri, Dhobi, Dom or Ghasi, are more urbanized, probably because, in comparison to the Scheduled Tribes, alienating them from their landholdings is easier. But even among these communities more than 80 per cent of people still live in villages. Occupationally 89 per cent of the Scheduled Tribe and 74 per cent of the Scheduled Caste workers in Jharkhand are engaged in agriculture.³² In addition, some others are dependent on forestry, artisans' works and such other traditional employment. Development programmes for the improvement of agriculture, forestry and rural living conditions would have improved their lots and consequently could have reduced the tensions arising out of lack of industrial employment. However, what has been done in the name of development is a jumble of thoughtless piecemeal plans which instead has worsened the scopes of traditional economic activities.

The Jharkhandi peasants are hardworking. In spite of unfavourable natural conditions, severe exploitations by moneylenders and complete negligence on the part of the government, they still compete at par with their counterparts elsewhere. In the production of rice and maize, the two major crops in this area, per acre productivity in Jharkhand is higher than that of the Gangetic Plains of Bihar. This is a success

31. Sengupta, *op. cit.*

32. As per 1971 Census.

that has been achieved in spite of the fact that irrigation facilities in Jharkhand are negligible. Although more than a fourth part of the total cultivated area in Bihar State is located in Jharkhand, it receives less than 7 per cent of total irrigation facilities in the state.³³ What is more significant is that the area irrigated in Jharkhand has come down drastically in the post-independence period, while during the same time it has increased in the rest of Bihar.

TABLE 5
Area Irrigated by all Sources as P.C. of Cropped Area

<i>District</i>	<i>1931*</i>	<i>1971**</i>
Santal Parganas	17.3	3.6
Singhbhum	14.7	3.9
Hazaribagh	1.4	2.1
Ranchi	0.2	2.1
Palamau	11.6	16.0
Dhanbad	n.a.	2.1
All Bihar	17.9	19.5

* Percentage of gross irrigated area to gross cropped area, Tables of all districts, *District Census Handbook*, 1961.

**Percentage of Irrigated area to net sown area, *Agricultural Census*, Bihar, 1971.

The indigenous system of irrigation developed mainly by the Santhals, which was a very efficient system under the characteristic terrain conditions, has almost been brought to an end by the indifference of the authority either to the ecology or to the organisation of the system.³⁴

33. As in 1972-73

34. Arvind N. Das and Nirmal Sengupta, *Agrarian Structure, Tension Movements and Peasant Organisations in Bihar*, Report (Unpublished).

Large parts (29.2 per cent) of the land area in Jharkhand is covered by forests. The proportion of fallow land is very high.⁸⁵ About a third part of the land area not under forests remains fallow even in normal years. Progress of reclamation is slow. Even under mild drought the current fallow increases rapidly. Thousands of cultivators are compelled to migrate to W. Bengal, Gangetic Bihar and further west in order to find some means of livelihood. The areas like Santhal Parganas or Singhbhum are not declared drought-prone areas because the rainfall is high. But because of the collapse of the traditional system of irrigation the rain-water quickly drains out of the hilly terrains and the effects are not less than droughts.

In the absence of irrigation facilities, there is little scope for the cultivation of other crops, or for multiple cropping. Practically no attention has been paid for the extension of dry farming techniques. As a result only about 12 per cent of the net sown area is cropped more than once. In the rest of Bihar, the corresponding figure is 38 per cent. Thus, even though they work hard, the Jharkhandi peasants have difficulties in making both ends meet. The single crop, produced from small holdings, together with the earnings as occasional agricultural labourers during the seasons, allow them to pull through for only a few

35. Land Use Pattern (*Excluding forest areas*) 1970-71

Sl. no.	Type of land	Jharkhand	Rest of Bihar	All India
1.	Uncultivable	10.7	5.2	13.1
2.	Cultivable fallow	7.1	1.2	6.6
3.	Current fallow	15.3	8.2	4.9
4.	Other fallow	12.0	2.3	3.9
5.	Land put to agr. use	42.8	68.8	57.8
6.	Land put to non-agr. use	12.1	14.2	13.6
7.	Total Geographical area excluding forests	100.0	99.9	99.9

Source : Directorate of Statistics and Evaluation, Bihar.

months in the year after meeting the moneylenders' demands. For the rest of the months they have to seek other sources of livelihood. Almost all the adivasi households rear fowls, which provide them food during the most difficult days. About 64 per cent of the total poultry and 40 per cent of livestock of the state of Bihar are found in the Jharkhand region.³⁶ Evidently, these activities are important in the subsistence needs of the Jharkhandis. But the government policy has failed to understand this characteristic difference, and like in Gangetic Bihar, in Chotanagpur-Santhal Parganas too, livestock and poultry is treated as only marginal to the agricultural extension and developmental services.

Every year a large number of workers migrate during the lean seasons, from Jharkhand to different parts of the country, and work elsewhere as agricultural labourers, brick-kiln workers and as other manual labourers. Wages are poor, labour contractors deduct a substantial part of it, and sometimes the Jharkhandi workers fail even to save enough so as to manage their return fares. In the last few years a shocking development of this phenomenon is being reported again and again. Some unscrupulous labour contractors by means of well-knit organisations are trafficking young people from Jharkhand to far off places like Punjab or Tripura where they are worked almost as slaves.³⁷

Those who do not migrate during the lean months, think of some other ways for survival. Earlier, seasonal migration to coal mines was an important subsidiary occupation. That venue of employment is now closed. But there are others like the mica mines or the *bidi* industry. In all these industries both the capital and the product markets are highly organised and the workers have to remain satisfied at whatever price the owners offer to them. A landlord of Manatu block (dt. Palamau) for example, controls the market for basket-trading which, incidentally, is the major source of secondary occupation

36. Livestock Census, 1972.

37. *The Indian Express*, January 19, 1978, p. 2 and 'Adivasis Suffering', editorial, *The Indian Nation*, April 14, 1980.

in that block. The makers are to accept prices, often as low as one-tenth of the market prices of the baskets—without complain; the landlord is virtually the monarch of the extremely backward and remote block, and has a tiger as a pet animal in his impressively-built palace.

Collection of forest products, being used either for direct consumption or as a secondary occupation through marketing, is of course the single most important work for survival. In addition, forests also provide certain items like firewood, essential for their ways of living. The State earns a revenue of over rupees thirty crores from forests in Jharkhand, and therefore, 'protects' those from being used by the inhabitants of that region. Unaccustomed to the idea of such restrictions in the past, the adivasis had rebelled from time to time. Today, they are entitled to receive 'licences' for the collection of certain forest products, which are considered essential to their ways of living. Naturally, licenses are levers of control for the issuing authorities and corruption on the part of the forest officials has been rampant. It must be noticed however, that only the Scheduled Tribes are entitled to get such licenses—the Scheduled Castes and Sadanis are refused altogether of any access.

The collection of forest products like *kendu* leaf, lac, *mahua* honey etc. and selling those to middlemen and traders had also provided for widespread exploitation of the gatherers in terms of prices paid. But the measure adopted by the government to check such exploitations has resulted in catastrophe. In the last few years almost all the trades have been nationalised. In consequence, anyone willing to sell a few days collection is bound to travel a distance which may be as long as forty or fifty kilometres, to reach the nearest purchasing centre. Practically, this source of earning has therefore come to a close and in desperation the Jharkhandis have clashed with the government and the police.³⁸ The same lack of understanding is manifest in other areas of forest management. The Forest Development Corporation has taken up a programme to replace *Sal* by *Sagwan* (Teakwood) trees, since the latter is more

38. Arun Sinha, "Resurgent Adivasis", *Economic and Political Weekly*, September 9, 1970.

valuable as wood in the market. Its consequence however, will be grave for the lives of adivasis, for *Sal* products are useful to them in various ways—as food, medicines, firewood, even in the matters of religious rites. The complete alien outlook in such a planning has given rise to one of the most widespread movements in Jharkhand area.³⁹

No one should make a virtue of the liquor habits of adivasis; but one should remember that similar habits among the poor people in other parts of the country have rarely brought devastating implications on their lives as it is with the Jharkhandis. The difference is not so much in their liquor habits but in the nature of liquor markets. The toddy-tappers elsewhere are small traders; the liquor market in Jharkhand is controlled by big business and cunning outsiders. It was the British administrators who had thoughtfully spread the network of liquor shops in this part of the country to keep the rebellious adivasis in check. It is the 'nationalist' government, which earned about Rs. 8 crores each year by keeping the Jharkhandis addicted⁴⁰, leave alone the gains out of keeping the struggle potentials down. Jharkhand has been made the biggest consumer of all types of intoxicants.

TABLE 6
Per Capita Consumption, 1973-74

<i>Item</i>	<i>Jharkhand</i>	<i>Rest of Bihar</i>
Country liquor	0.50 litre	0.16 litre
Ganja	1.0 gm.	0.25 gm.
Bhang	0.56 gm.	0.08 gm.

Source : Commissioner of Excise, Bihar.

39. A. K. Roy, "Sal means Jharkhand, Saguwan means Bihar", *Sunday* (weekly), Calcutta, April 8, 1979 pp. 46-47.

40. Net Excise Revenue in 1973-74: from Jharkhand districts, Rs. 8.42 crores and from the rest of Bihar, Rs. 9.57 crores.
—source : Commissioner of Excise, Bihar.

No wonder, *Kalali Toro, Jharkhand Chhoro* (smash liquor shops, quit Jharkhand) has been the first struggle call of a militant Jharkhand Mukti Morcha.

The Jharkhand Movement

Throughout the period of British ascendancy the Jharkhandis have rebelled again and again—in the primitive way.⁴¹ The old pattern began to change under the influence of forces of modernisation, from about the beginning of the twentieth century. It is true that the German Evangelical Lutheran Mission, established in Ranchi as early as in 1857 had created an educated section among the adivasis in Ranchi who had led the *Sardari Larai* of the Mundas even in the late nineteenth century. Birsa Munda himself was educated under the influence of the Mission. Yet "Birsa's death (1900) can be taken roughly to be the end of the traditional religious type of leadership and as the beginning of a rationalistic type of leadership.... The sources of their (the new leaders') were not the 'dreams' and 'divinations' but their education and experience and political skill gained through contacts with modern civilisation."⁴² Almost at the same time, when Rajendra Prasad established Bihari Students' Conference in Patna, the first Students' organisation in the country—Christian Students' Conference was convened in Hazaribagh in 1910. The Christian adivasi students to start with that organisation had some philanthropic ideas. But very soon they turned to the question of socio-economic upliftment and were reorganised in Chotanagpur Unnati Samaj (1915). In 1939 Unnati Samaj was again reorganised into a political organisation 'Adivasi Mahasabha' and for the first time raised the question of creation of a Jharkhand State.

The modern approach of these organisations was also reflected in their recruitment policies. Unlike the old movements of single tribes under a messianic leader, the Students' Conference was composed of students belonging to various tribes. With the formation of Unnati Samaj, gate was opened to non-

41. Stephen Fuchs has characterised these as 'messianic movements, *Rebellions Prophets: A Study of Messianic Movements in Indian Religions*, Bombay, 1965.

42. Shashishekhar Jha, *Political Elite in Bihar*, Bombay, 1972, pp. 106.

Christian adivasis. Adivasi Mahasabha, in spite of its name, opened its membership to non-adivasis of that region—although it must be remembered that the strict distinction between tribals and non-tribals in the popular minds has been crystallised only years after the announcement of Scheduled Tribes list by the government in 1936. The Jharkhand Party formed in 1950 followed the same type of recruitment policy of enlisting non-Scheduled Tribe members although its leaders were caught into a dilemma of choice between leadership of Scheduled Tribes all over India or the same of all people in Jharkhand. While such were the conscious policies for establishing broad fronts of people, the initiators of these organisations were the Christian converts, English educated students belonging to Munda and Oraon tribes, the two major tribes of Ranchi area, and in consequence, at least in the initial years, these organisations have shown four prominent traits—(i) urban orientation in thinking and activity, (ii) Christian domination and close links with the Churches (iii) predominantly Munda-Oraon organisation and (iv) efforts to establish tribal solidarity alone often tending to sectarian behaviour against non-tribal autochthones. Although the profile at present is considerably different nevertheless, the old images survive in varying degrees either in leaders' ways of thinking or in peoples' minds. Thus, both expression of sectarian behaviour by Jharkhandi leaders as well as sectarian characterisation of Jharkhand movement by vested interests, are quite common. In fact the questions of Christian and non-converts have been important rallying points.⁴³ In the more recent period riots between Scheduled Tribes and Sadanis have been recorded.⁴⁴

Jharkhand problem has been basically a class problem. Being unable to solve it within the scope of non-class philosophies, the people of this region have repeatedly vacillated between the question of assimilation with, and distinction from, the mainstream of Indian life. Sardari Larai had found much

43. e. g. anti-Christian demonstration in 1968 led by Kartick Oraon (Congress). For further details see L. P. Vidyarthi and K. N. Sahay, *Dynamics of Tribal Leadership in Bihar*, Allahabad, 1976.

44. In 1979 moneylender-peasant tension in eastern parts of Ranchi district developed into an acute tribe-Sadan 'tension' between Mundas and Mahatos, in which one person was killed.

of its inspiration from the Christian Missions whose actions, although motivated to conversion, was in opposition to Hindu money-lenders. But during the latter period, when the vested interest of the Church became clear, Birsa too turned away from them and sided more with Hinduism. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, one section of the Jharkhandis, led by the Unnati Samaj and the Adivasi Mahasabha have found in the Church the role of saviours and philanthropists. On the other hand, certain other sections among the Jharkhandis have formed the Kisan Sabha,⁴⁵ co-operated with the Congress Party in the nationalist movement and even embraced Hinduism, hoping that emancipation may come through those courses of action. Till the forties there was no obvious choice between the two streams. Inspired by the broad-frontal idea of Gandhian movement, the Congress had extended its support to the Tana Bhagat movement of the Oraons or Kherwar movement among the Santhals; have worked for the development of the Harijans and engineered 'sanskritisation' among the Kurmi Mahatos in Jharkhand.⁴⁶ But the dilemma of choice was eliminated by the late forties when the Jharkhand Party under Jaipal Singh called for direct action and the formation of a nation state, while the Congress backed out from radical actions and as the ruling party, came to defend the vested interests. Since then, there was evidently a massive swing of popular interests towards the Jharkhand Party which lasted till the mid-sixties and came to a hopeless end after the Jharkhand Party merged with the Congress in 1963 and Jaipal Singh accepted a portfolio in Bihar Cabinet. Both the alternatives, having met with dead ends—gave an urge for rethinking in the late sixties, and when the Jharkhand question reappeared with vigour in the 'seventies', its orientation has been tinged more with class questions.

The urge to overcome the urban orientation in its activities was felt by a section of Jharkhandi youth, even at the very early stages. Theble Oraon and Lorentius Burla for example, had left Unnati Samaj and formed a Kisan Sabha in 1931. However, neither this nor any other branch of the Bihar Kisan

45. Founded in 1931.

46. See B. K. Mehta's article in this volume.

Sabha formed in Jharkhand in the later period attained any notable success, probably because the Sabha's programmes, suitable for the Gangetic Bihar, was not effective in Chotanagpur and Santhal Parganas—regulated by special tenancy Acts. Apparently, in 1941, while he was in Hazaribagh Jail, Swami Sahajananda, the great leader of the Bihar Kisan movement, made a serious effort to study the characteristic agrarian problems of the Jharkhand region.⁴⁷ In 1946 the Provincial Kisan Conference was convened at Bermo (dt. Hazaribagh). But in the same year, at least in Hazaribagh, the championship of the agrarian cause was snatched away by Ramgarh Raj Kamakhya Narain Singh, the biggest landlord of the region. In a cunning move the landlord did not only pre-empt but overdo the Congress agrarian programme by surrendering claims to any type of rents from his tenants and thus emerged almost overnight as the most popular leader of the tenantry in Hazaribagh.⁴⁸ He had maintained this popularity for a long time, remained in the rallying point in case of any tension against the Congress agrarian programme and in effect, successfully prevented the emergence of any serious agrarian agitations in areas under his influence.

In essence, the agrarian struggle, till the independence, was confined to some pocket struggles organised by Kisan Sabha or such other groups or some spontaneous struggles against the landlords or money-lenders. The real change came when the Jharkhand Party entered into the field of organising agrarian struggles. To be exact, the top leaders of the Party had never engaged themselves in agrarian programmes. In the General Elections the Party had sponsored several candidates from Santhal Parganas and in this way received for the first time, a good number of activists from the Santhal tribe. This section eventually gave a turn to the activity of the Jharkhand Party. Indeed, it may not be much of an exaggeration to say that the Jharkhand movement among the Santhal, unlike the same among the Mundas and Oraons, has always been oriented

47. Unpublished manuscript and diary of Sahajananda between August, 1941 to March, 1942.

48. S. Jha, *op. cit.*

highly towards the agrarian cause and the storm centres of Jharkhand agrarian movements has not been Ranchi but Santhal Parganas, the home of the Santhals. Between 1955 and 1961 Santhal Parganas, witnessed a good many anti-moneylender agrarian struggles led by the Santhal activists, in particular by Satrugna Besra, M.L.A. from Jamtara. But all these struggles came to an abrupt halt after the Jharkhand party merged with the Congress in 1963.

Till 1962, Jharkhand region had held a prominent place in the politics of Bihar. The two important opposition parties in Bihar Assembly, the Jharkhand Party and the Janata Party of Ramgarh Raj, were seated in Jharkhand. Practically the whole of the opposition to the Congress in the Bihar Assembly was the opposition from the Jharkhand region. All of a sudden a political vacuum was created in 1963—when the Jharkhand Party merged with the Congress and the Janata Party was finished while hobnobbing first with Swatantra Party and then with Congress. During the next four years—several newly formed groups, some disgruntled elements of the old Jharkhand Party who did not approve the merger, tried to fill in the vacuum. None of them attained any significant success and remained confined to certain pockets of influence. But then came the General Election of 1967. Congress candidates met with a debacle. Many old Jharkhand Party members again returned to support this or that of the splinter groups whose continuations have been justified. Attempts followed to merge these splinter groups into one Party. But that did not succeed. In the period following 1967 the Jharkhand movement continues, probably with increased vigour, but not as a unified movement. The various small groups work in various areas under their influences and follow different programmes. The only point of their agreement is the demand for a separate Jharkhand state. Once in a while, the various groups meet on this common platform. The extent of the movement can be understood by the fact that in 1977 almost all the M.L.A.'s and M.P.'s from Jharkhand region irrespective of their Party affiliations, had jointly raised the demand for a separate state.⁴⁹ Thus,

49. An All-Party Sangharsha Samiti was created in the meeting on 14.10.77.—*The Indian Nation*, October 15, 1977.

on the one hand the Jharkhand movement has more commonly been known as the movement for the creation of an autonomous Jharkhand State, and on the other hand there has been a tendency on the part of the groups, political parties, observers and researchers to depict Jharkhand movement in terms of the partial knowledge about one or two of such local groups, to describe the strong and weak points of the local groups as the strong and weak sides of the movement in general.

Political Programmes of Jharkhand Movement

As long as there was a unified Party there was a unique programme. At present the situation is so complex that even the number of groups working for the cause are constantly changing, leave alone the talk of a singular programme. Even these groups are revising their respective programmes very frequently, in the light of the experiences they are gaining regularly. Indeed, for many such groups no documented programmes exist; the activists are undertaking works for furthering the cause in a manner in which their individual experiences and knowledges permit. In such circumstances it is better to outline the types and sources of variations instead of any general and unanimously accepted programme.

As it was with their forerunners, the Jharkhandi groups at present exhibit various types of traits depending on their characteristic mass-bases. However, varieties have increased. Along with urban-oriented groups there exists several village-based groups. Apart from Mundas and Oraons, important Scheduled Tribes like the Santhals; and Sadanis like the Kurmi Mahatos dominate in some political organisations. There exist several organisations run by the non-converts—All India political parties like the Congress factions or Janata Party have often encouraged such organisations. And as has been discussed already, almost all possible definitions have been accepted by one group or the other for describing who is a 'Jharkhandi'. While all these groups reflect the aspirations of only sections of the Jharkhandi population and in that behave as sectarians at times, they all demand the creation of a separate Jharkhand state, are concerned about the socio-economic upliftment of the people and

contribute to the view that 'dikus' are responsible for the sad plight of Jharkhand region—although the meaning of 'diku' is not agreed upon.

The edge of the struggle has undergone much change. Agrarian struggles, in particular anti-moneylender struggles, which had more or less subsided under the Adivasis Mahasabha or the Jharkhand Party, has become an important phenomenon since about 1968. As it was throughout the country, in Jharkhand also agrarian unrest had become a widespread phenomenon since 1967, either as a spontaneous phenomenon or as led by one or the other of the newly formed Jharkhand groups⁵⁰ or even by small Communist groups. Amendment of the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act in 1969 gave a fillip to such agrarian struggles. A number of important groups including Birsa Seva Dal or Jharkhand Mukti Morcha were born and developed mostly out of these struggles.

While anti-moneylender agrarian struggle has been an old phenomenon in Jharkhand, a new phenomenon has been added in the recent period related with the industry-agriculture, more correctly the modern and traditional sectoral contradictions. Rapid industrial development and neglect of traditional sector has made this conflict a very important phenomenon in the recent period. It should be noted that the bureaucratic State capital, not the private capital, controls the major share of investments in Jharkhand in the modern sector. The State has attained this position in the last two decades by constructing several big industries in the public sector as well as by nationalising coal mines, forests and parts of the trading activities, which were earlier in the domain of private sector. The share of bureaucratic capital in the economy and in consequence the struggle of the people against the same in Jharkhand, is proportionately much higher in Jharkhand than in any other part of

50. e. g. On May 12, 1969 the Birsa Seva Dal, Birsa Party and the Krantikari Morcha organised a march of about 3,000 adivasi men and women with bows and arrows. They trekked the 22 mile route from Khunti to Ranchi. Their demand included creation of a separate Jharkhand state and restoration of land to adivasis.

—*The Indian Nation*, May 13, 1968.

the country. Beginning with the rally of the displaced adivasis in Ranchi on January 9, 1962 in demand of proper compensation from the Heavy Engineering Corporation Ltd., there has occurred several such demonstrations, resistance to land acquisitions and even struggles to oppose nationalisation, which constitutes important part of Jharkhand movement today.

Another characteristic and probably the most significant change that has occurred particularly in the post-independence period is division along ethnic lines in the very ranks of the working people in Jharkhand. In the past neither the population of organized workers were numerically so important nor did—they consist so overwhelmingly of the immigrants. By being of the same ethnic origins as are the exploiters and oppressors in Jharkhand, the outsider working class often share the superior race psychology of them. At the same time the numerical strength of this section has given a semblance of mass oppression of the Jharkhandis by the outsiders. In 1954, while demanding for the creation of a separate state, the M.L.A's belonging to the Jharkhand Party did not raise the question of exploitation by the Biharis from the Gangetic part of Bihar.⁵¹ But no Jharkhandi group can evade this question any more—some of them are still in the process of consideration, some others have already demanded expulsion of all other outsiders.

In the past, the working class in Jharkhand had remained rather indifferent to Jharkhand question—a position which is not tenable anymore. In Jharkhand region some regional and community names have already assumed definite exploitative connotations. The name *Bhojpuri* is understood almost synonymously as 'goonda elements', *Marwari* as 'the profiteer' and *Madras* as the distinct class of moneylenders identifiable by their peculiar mode of operation. It is true that the hired hoodlums of the moneyed men and the bourgeoisie are predominantly Bhojpuris. But unfortunately what is conveyed by the above connotation is a distorted meaning that 'the Bhojpuris are predominantly goonda elements'—which is far from the truth. In reality, barring a handful of the goonda elements, the

51. K. L. Sharma, *op. cit.*

majority of the Bhojpuri immigrants are workers in mines and industries and often form the backbone of the trade unions of workers in this region. The Bihari immigrants are mainly toilers even if they have replaced the Jharkhandi aspirants in jobs by unfair ways. The majority of the outsiders sell their labour power. They have a glorious history of struggles. Trade union movements began here in the early 'twenties'. The second All India Conference of the A.I.T.U.C. as early as in 1921 was held in Jharia. The TISCO agitations in the 'twenties', 'thirties' and 'fifties', the Coal-miners struggle in Dhanbad in 1954,⁵² the strike of Bokaro Steel workers in 1977 and the present phase of the working class struggle in Dhandad in face of rampant goondaism⁵³ have rare parallels in the working class militancies. But all these struggles can aptly be described as 'by the organised industrial workers for themselves'. None of these had any relevance for the Jharkhand movement and the outsider working class had existed more or less as a group of people located in but alienated from the mainstream of Jharkhand polity. The attitude of indifference shown by the organised working class towards the peasants and the destitutes is a phenomenon that is marked everywhere. What is distinct in Jharkhand is that a time has come when the numerous section of the peasantry do not merely grudge the better-offs among the workers, but actually point to them as the reason for their own wretched existence. The organised working class in Jharkhand is now forced to take up a stand vis-a-vis the local movement.

The full urge to take a concrete stand has not yet developed from either side. The political parties like the C.P.I., C.P.I (M), or even the Congress, who dominate in the major trade unions, have made only nominal statements. Although, as the All

52. Com. Gupteshwar Pathak (28), Dukhit Dusadh (27), both of Gaya district and Mahabir Teli of Hazaribagh were hanged on February 24, 1954.

53. According to official sources as many as 24 political murders were committed in about a hundred days in 1978—*Ec. & Pol. Weekly*, March 10, 1979, p. 550.

This gives an idea what type of militancy is needed even for the continuation of trade union works in coal mines.

India parties their stands are mostly opposed to the Jharkhand cause they have not stepped in to undertake the task. On the other hand, the Jharkhandis have not yet been activity involved against the outsiders. Once in a while such actions are discussed as 'to occupy' the township of Maithon—but lack of earnestness is evident as no such programme has up till now been carried out. But how long will these developments be confined to threats alone? The All India Parties, the working class organisations and the Jharkhandi activist groups all are pondering over this question. Neither the autonomy demand, nor the cultural upheaval, nor even the rising agrarian tensions, but this imminent danger of worker-peasant clash is the one reason which has made the political climate in Jharkhand, sultry.

Among the innumerable phenomena within the fold of Jharkhand movement it is possible to pick up even such cases where working class has lent its active support to the Jharkhand cause. One remembers the way 'Jharkhand Diwas' (4th February) was celebrated, particularly in 1973 and 1974.⁵⁴ The celebration was organised jointly by the 'Jharkhand Mukti Morcha'—a peasant organisation, and the 'Bihar Colliery Kamgar Union'—a workers' trade union. In 1974, about twenty thousand workers participated in the celebration, along with forty thousand peasants, demanding Jharkhand state. In unison with the Jharkhandi peasants, the Bhojpuri (and other immigrants) workers shouted out such slogans as 'Jharkhand is ours' or 'Go back, *Dikus*'. The very presence of twenty thousand workers in support of their demands had tremendous impact on the consciousness of even the most backward peasants. They *witnessed* who were their allies and returned to their villages with a clearer idea about their friends and their enemies. The leaders too were moved by the example. They unequivocally declared that 'Jharkhandi means a producer, irrespective of caste, tribe or nation, residing in Jharkhand,'

54. In the later years the solidarity demonstrations were not so strong. Although the participation of workers in Jharkhand Diwas celebration did not stop altogether the number of such participants decreased.

that 'the dream of Jharkhand is to create a Lalkhand'—free from exploitation and oppression.

However, such a development was more circumstantial. When the trade-union-based Communist activists like A. K. Roy had initiated the peasant movement in Dhanbad, to begin with, there was only a desire but no guideline as to how to link a trade union movement of workers to the peasants' cause. As long as the peasant organisations were in their infancy, the political activists tried hard to mobilise workers in support of the peasants more in order to give at least a semblance of numerical strength. The result was action programmes like the joint rallies in *Jharkhand Diwas*. The situation has changed considerably in the later years. Since the support struggles were not a part of the conscious policy, such actions were altogether dropped once the pressure of events mounted in the reverse direction. During the Emergency many of the top-ranking leaders were in prison. To the others the question of survival was acute, and there was no time to organise such programmes as joint actions by workers and peasants. The *Jharkhand Diwas* was celebrated; but only by the peasants. After the Emergency was lifted, the gulf between the two fronts widened because of altogether different reasons. As both workers' and peasants' movements grew, the individual activists engaged in one or the other of the fronts, were swayed away by the constant and numerous immediate needs of their particular fronts alone. The spontaneous and popular demands easily attract numerous supporters; in contrast, support meetings or such demonstrations are not merely thinly attended, but also require lots of persuasion and even courage on the part of the activists to face uneasy questions about 'real' intention of the Jharkhand movement. As a result, in workers' meetings at present only a handful of the most advanced activists may raise the problems of local people in Jharkhand. The majority of even those activists who had initiated the joint rally in 1974 have altogether left such discussion, leave alone support actions. May be the trend was a short-lived trend. Yet, it deserves such a detailed introduction because no discussion of the programmes of Jharkhand movement is complete without discussing the

unusual and unorthodox programme of the working class supporting the Jharkhand cause, without the mention of the fact, that the first martyr for the Jharkhand cause in the 'seventies' was Sadanand Jha,⁵⁵ a fiery trade union leader of Gomoh (dt. Dhanbad), who was born not in Jharkhand but in a small village in the 'diku' heartland of North Bihar. Exceptions they may be, but the commitments of Sadanand Jha and the likes are tremendously significant—for they alone hold the promise of narrowing the ever-widening gulf between Jharkhand and the advanced parts of the country.

55. Sadananda Jha was one of the first martyrs of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha movement. Born in North Bihar, he was an extremely popular trade union leader of Gomoh, Dhanbad. When he was killed by goondas in 1973 he was still in his 'twenties'. Even to this date his memory is inspiring to many Jharkhand Mukti Morcha activists.

Industrial Development in Tribal India :

**The Case of the Iron Ore Mining Industry in
Singhbhum District, c1900-1960**

STUART CORBRIDGE

Introduction

In this paper an attempt is made to reconstruct the nature and consequences of the growth of the iron ore mining industry amongst the predominantly tribal population of the Kolhan in Singhbhum District, Bihar. Beginning with a brief overview of the manner in which the conditions necessary for the very existence and growth of large scale iron mining ventures were secured, the bulk of the paper is devoted to an examination of the composition of the labour force, its working conditions, and the components of the total social wage it received. Rejecting the optimistic teleologies that all too often accompany accounts of industrial development in India, the emphasis here is on the differential access to jobs, wages and conditions accorded to the local/tribal and non-local sections of the workforce.

Preconditions

With the benefit of hindsight the growth of an iron ore mining industry in Chotanagpur seemed inevitable. But this

was not strictly the case. Despite the widespread availability of high quality ores in the Kolhan area of Singhbhum District, their commercial exploitation presupposed not only a healthy measure of state support for the nascent steel industry as a whole but also suitable prospecting and mining regulations, cheaply available land for the mining operations, and an adequate supply of labour. Not until the end of the last century could these preconditions be collectively secured in Chotanagpur.

State support, of course, had been withheld from a number of iron and steel ventures in the nineteenth century.¹ Governments steadfastly refused either to underwrite the capital requirements of the enterprises or to guarantee a minimum number of purchases once operational. However, the climate of official opinion slowly began to swing as the turn of the century approached. The Famine Commission Report of 1880 had underlined the need for the growth of non-agricultural employment opportunities, and the trade figures released by the Commerce Department revealed that the British were fast surrendering their control of the iron market in India to their Belgian and German competitors. These economic imperatives, more than any sudden reversal of ideology, meant that quiet Government support for a native iron and steel industry was, by 1900, far less offensive to vested interests than it had been before.

In a similar spirit Government updated its mining and prospecting regulations. Following Major Mohan's report in 1899, prospecting licenses were at long last granted to registered Companies as well as to individuals, and the right to mine was no longer divorced from the right to prospect.² This liberalisation soon had an effect—with the surveyed resources of iron ore and other minerals registering a sharp upturn :

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1. The cases of the Porto Novo Iron Works (1830-50) and the Bengal Iron Works (1870-90) are preeminent.
 2. F. R. Harria (1958) p153.

Non-Coal Mineral Concessions on Government Land

1899	—	60
1904	—	189
1906	—	252
Jan/Sept 1907	—	400+ (after Percival, 1908, p6).

With Government policy thus realigned it might be thought that the other two preconditions—land and labour—would be easily satisfied amongst the extensive plateaus of Chotanagpur. But once again matters were not so straightforward, as a brief review of the region's history will make clear.

Even prior to British rule the hill strongholds of Chotanagpur were rarely the undifferentiated tribal domains of nationalist literature. Most districts had already been subjected to the processes of subinfeudation and stratification that were later crystallised when the British imposed the Bengali concept of Zamindari/raiyat upon the region. Gradually the voluntary dues (*chanda*) paid by the tribals to their regional chieftains for protection had been converted into feudal rents appropriated by the newly styled Rajas. Moreover these Hinduised 'kings' proceeded to further privatise control of the cultivable wastes (which became rajahs land). Settling most of these lands with a non-indigenous peasantry (but one technically equipped to produce an agricultural surplus to aid the upkeep of the new tribal overlords), the extravagant and indebted Rajas slipped into further dependence upon their high caste advisors and hangers-on. Not unusually the Rajas' debts were settled in the form of further land grants. In this way the communal tribal tenures (*khuntkatta*) were progressively degraded (to *bhuinhari* tenures), or simply broken up and alienated to the hated and oppressive Thiccadars and Kunwars. The British achievement was simply to sanction and extend this division of tribal society and tenures by making land increasingly a commodity negotiable in the courts.

However the tribals did not acquiesce in this attack on their rights and lands—as their successive rebellions in the nineteenth century amply testify. Paradoxically, one effect of these protestations was that it prompted the British to solve the region's

agrarian tensions "...by means of remedial legislation which for some time made matters worse until comprehensive measures were introduced which came too late to save the tribal village communities" (Rothermund).³ Chief among these was the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act of 1908, which effectively placed legal breaks on the institutionalisation of tribal land as a commodity. Henceforth all transfers of land from the aboriginals had to have the express permission of the Deputy Commissioner of the District.

Now, in the wake of this Act, and in the wake of a number of contemporary Forestry Reservation Orders in the Kolhan, the acquisition of mining land in western Singhbhum was not without its problems. Rather it presupposed the existence of a wide-ranging Land Acquisition Act. Such an Act was supplied in 1894. Indeed the Act was so strong that Pandit Malaviya suggested that its definition of 'public use' was broad enough to sanction land for practically any purpose.⁴ The Chotanagpur Tenancy Act was thus subverted and the task of the mining companies made so much easier.

More pertinently, it is questionable whether the companies ever had to pay the full value of the land they acquired. Not only were the necessary cart tracks and so forth maintained from Government budgets, but the tribals of the Kolhan were grossly undercompensated for the loss of their lands (even allowing for the fact that land prices are traditionally lower in Chotanagpur than in the Rest of Bihar). In short it does not seem unreasonable to conclude that Chotanagpur in general, but Singhbhum in particular, were cheaply opened up to the sponsors of industrial capital in the first quarter of the twentieth century at the tribals' expense.

Our final precondition—labour—can be dealt with more briefly. Despite western Singhbhum being sparsely populated, a steady supply of labour was nevertheless guaranteed by the same erosion of tribal rights and tenures that we have already discussed. For with access to land and forests increasingly cir-

3. Rothermund D (1978) p 172

4. Malaviya P, Dissent to the Indian Industrial Commission 1916.

cumscribed, Chotanagpur saw the growth of a landless proletariat which was at first exported to the tea gardens of Assam, but which increasingly found work in the booming mining ventures within the region. And to this local stock of labour we must also add the increasing stream of immigrants to the area; travellers taking advantage of the newly extended Bengal-Nagpur railway and the recently metalled roads that bisected Singhbhum. Thus by the 1910s an adequate supply of labour was assured. All our four preconditions had been secured.

The Labour Force

The mere existence of a potential labour force tells us very little about its likely composition, regional origins, or the manner of its recruitment. Yet it is only such a disaggregated analysis that can allow us to appraise the extent to which the local tribals were compensated for the cheap loss of their lands by gaining remunerative employment in the mines. Ideally information on such matters would come from the relevant Company attendance records. In their absence we must glean what we can, cross-sectionally from various reports and secondary accounts not directly designed to yield such information. Fortunately these sources do allow us to chart the broad trends with some degree of accuracy.

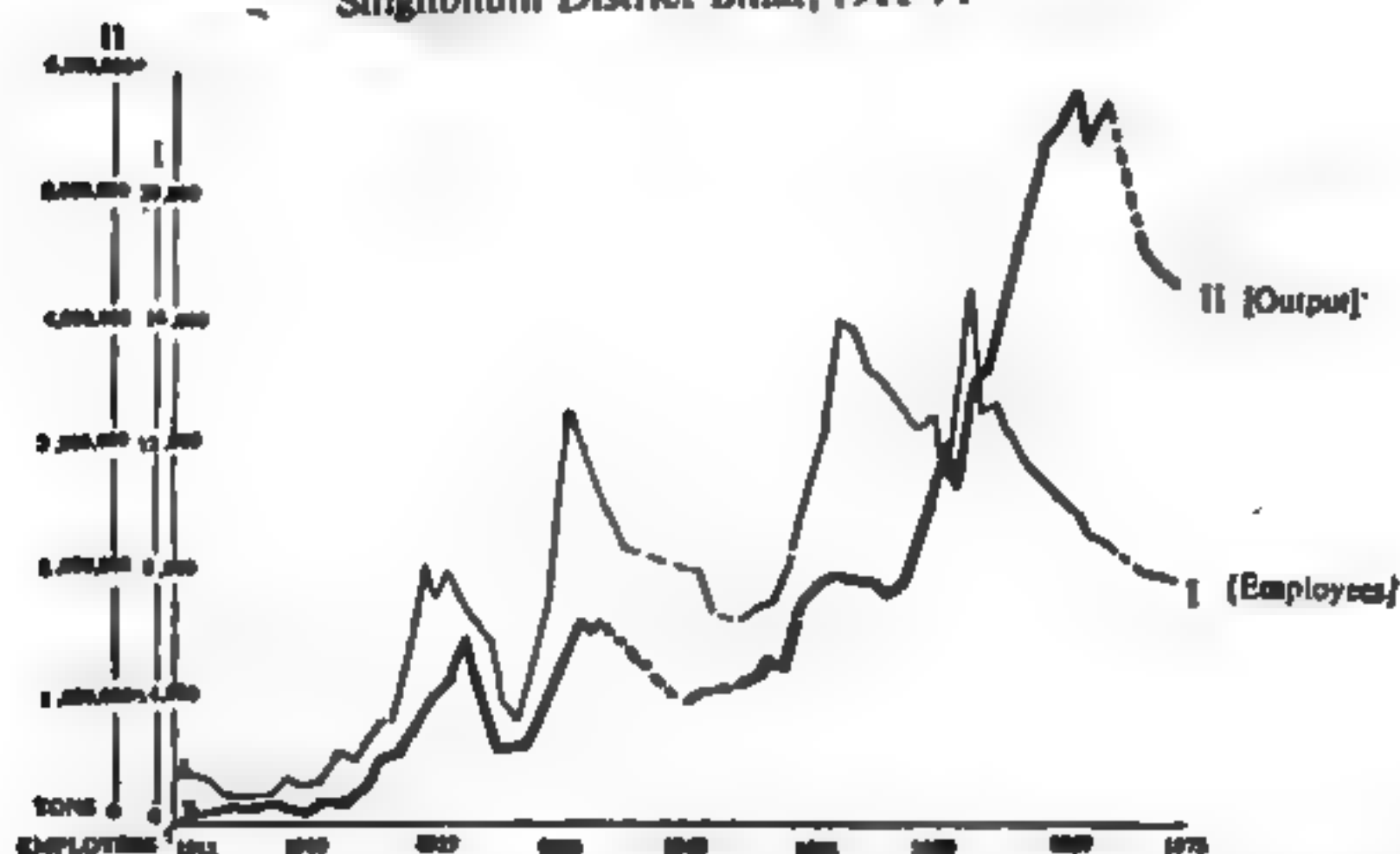
The great majority of the iron mining labour force, as we would expect, were indeed recruited from the tribal villages directly surrounding the mines.⁵ But if the tribals were well represented quantitatively in this labour force, their weight in the skilled and administrative echelons were correspondingly and respectively less. According to the 1921 Census, which is the only official body of statistics to report on the caste and birth-place of both the skilled and the unskilled employees at the four large iron mines in Singhbhum, only 246 unskilled workers came from outside the province of Bihar and Orissa. And of the remaining 4,007 the great majority were clearly drawn from the

5. The major mines that established themselves in Singhbhum in our period are the Nourmudi mine of the Tata Iron and Steel Company and the Gua and Manoharpur mines of the Indian Iron and Steel Company.

local tribes—the Santals, Oraons, Bhumij, Munda and Hos. By contrast as many as 156 of the 544 skilled male workers came from areas other than Bihar and Orissa.⁶ In particular there was a clerical stratum of Bengalis, and groups of masons from the United Provinces and the Central Provinces. Because of an unwieldy 'other castes' category it is impossible to assess the exact tribal representation amongst the skilled workers, but without doubt it was disproportionately low. Just to emphasise the regional/caste differentials within the labour force, three of the four mine managers at this time were Europeans.

Unfortunately not even these meagre statistics were collected in the 1931, 1941 or 1951 Censuses. Unlike mica, copper or coal mining, the still limited labour needs of the time (see fig. 1) prompted no detailed official reports on the composition and attributes of the iron mines' workforce.

Figure 1: Trends in Iron Ore Output and Employment—
Singhbhum District Bihar, 1911-74



There are however a number of contemporary monographs which make reference to the labour situation at the mines. The anthropologist D. N. Majumdar, who was associated with the Hos of Kolhan throughout the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s affirmed

6. P. C. Tallents, *Census of India 1921*, Vol. 7, Bihar & Orissa, Table 22.

that, "The mining centres...get a constant supply of local labour, as on all sides of them are Ho villages".⁷ And Victor Keenan, the Irish-American General Manager at the TISCO (Jamshedpur) in the thirties saw at Noamundi, "...endless streams of Kohl, Santal and Ho women, the inhabitants of the district, walking in a steady line from the mining faces to the narrow gauge track with baskets of ore on their heads".⁸ Neither account gives us any reason to suppose that tribal representation in the skilled and administrative cadres was any greater in 1940 than in 1920. (Probably the opposite : certainly their overall quantitative dominance diminished slightly). To an extent of course this is to be expected. Most of the tribals were still seasonal workers at the mines, and they had neither the skills nor literacy needed to hold down higher posts. But this is only part of the story. A sizeable percentage of the local tribals were becoming increasingly reliant on permanent mining labour, and their continued exclusion from the better rewarded mining jobs—up to and beyond the time of Adarkar's detailed report in 1945—is certainly an indictment of the Government and Companies' failure to educate the tribals in the relevant technical and clerical pursuits. Not one apprenticeship was offered to the local tribal youth in the thirties and forties.

(II) Women and Children

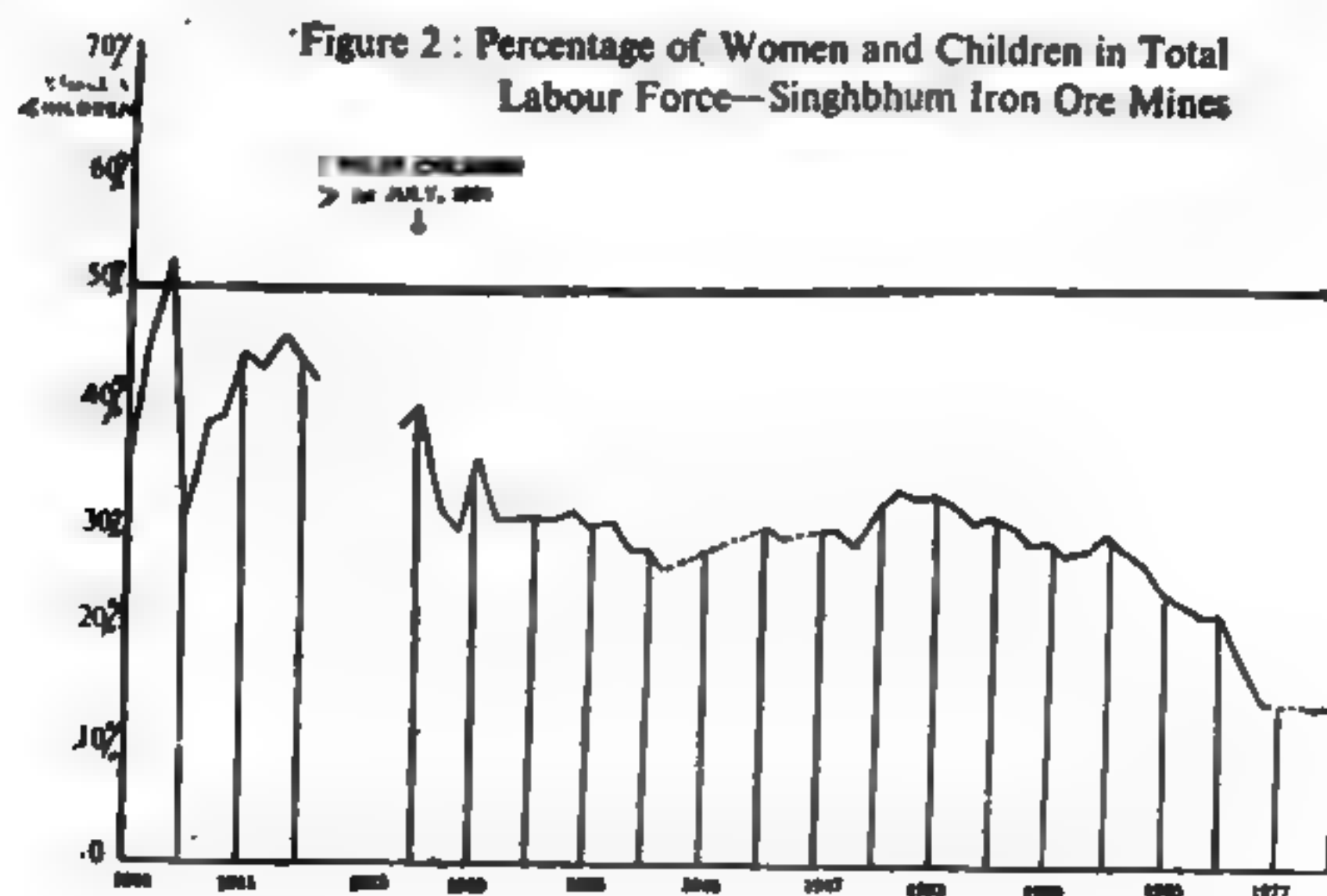
Tribal women, and to a much lesser extent tribal children, formed important constituent elements of the iron mining labour force (see Fig. 2). Comparatively, indeed, only the manganese mines have recorded such a high female involvement. Apart from manganese, iron mines comes second. But female involvement in iron ore as well as in manganese mines is declining slowly. Female involvement in iron mines has declined from 38.2 per cent in 1951 to 23.2 per cent in 1969. Similarly, female involvement in manganese mines has declined from 43.9 per cent in 1951 to 39.7 in 1969. In the table below figures of female per centage in different mining industries have been shown :

7. Majumdar (1950) pp. 292-293
Keenan (1945) p. 150

	1951	1952	1957	1962	1965	1967	1969
Coal	15.7	14.8	11.7	8.9	7.0	6.6	5.8
Iron	38.2	35.6	29.5	26.7	25.7	25.2	23.2
Mica	13.8	12.1	8.2	8.4	7.6	7.2	9.4
Mange.	43.9	42.4	40.4	39.9	41.0	41.0	39.7
Others	21.8	21.3	23.1	24.4	23.4	21.1	N.A.
All	20.1	N.A.	19.3	N.A.	14.4	13.5	12.2

Source : K. Subramanian
(1977), p. 34.

Not that this is entirely unexpected. The high female participation rate reflects both the specific structural characteristics of the local tribal societies, and the particular demands of the labour activity itself. So, although it is the case that all Chotanagpur tribes are patrilocal and partilocal, institutionalised



sexual divisions have been far less common amongst them than amongst caste Hindus. Whilst politically the exclusion of women from the panchayats may have been almost total, economically they have generally only been debarred from the ploughing operations. Indeed many commentators have stressed that the womens 'workloads have been a good deal harder to bear than their menfolks'. And this was a feature that carried through to mining: Majumdar noted that it was often the women who were sent off to the orefields when the family was in need of some ready cash (to pay the *malgoozari*—rent—for example) (1937 p186). Nor was female labour at all incompatible with the routines of the mines; quite the opposite. Female labour was cheap (as we shall see), relatively docile, and well equipped to undertake the many unskilled tasks in what were essentially huge open cast quarries. With no special mining needs—such as children to negotiate narrow mine-shafts—cheap and docile women were just what the mine manager ordered. And there were plenty to choose from.

As in the Indian coal mines, then, a family system of production was in vogue. By and large the male workers arrogated to themselves the more interesting, and better paid, mining and drilling operations. Their womenfolk were thus more or less limited to loading the cut ores into baskets, humping these baskets on to their heads, clambering up the slippery side of the quarry, and dumping their loads into the waiting tubs or aerial ropeways. To Buchanan's way of thinking, in 1934, this physically exhausting work was, "A somewhat strange relic of the old days" whereby "...the loading of iron (was) from baskets on womens' heads rather than by steam shovel". But his guide, the American mine manager, was quick to point out the naivety of Buchanan's reasoning. From a managerial point of view the practice was perfectly rational. "It is a matter of economy" he explained "Rice to feed the women costs less than coal to feed the steam shovel" (Buchanan p290). Especially if the women grew that rice themselves in their own fields.

Physical exertion was not the only problem that confronted the tribal women. Ever since children had been banned from minework—1st June 1924—her family's integrity and unity had

increasingly been under threat. Most worryingly there was a consequent lack of supervision of the tribal children. With neither creche nor nursery facilities provided, far too many of the children would stray into the mining compound, and occasionally a child would meet its death amongst the mine's moving tubs, rattling machinery or falling ores. Nor was the surrounding jungle a much safer prospect....

But such sentiments cut little ice with the mining companies. Although the uproar that had greeted the prospective exclusion of women from underground work in the coal mines had dissipated once the likely deficiency was made good by an influx of male labour, no such sanguine outcome could be expected in the open-cast quarries. Female labour remained an essential element of the mines' workforce. Easy to recruit when the demand for iron ore boomed, tribal women were equally easy to lay off in the slumps. If not exactly a reserve pool of labour—their consistently high participation rate should caution us against such a characterisation—the tribal women remained a convenient source of cheap, and periodically expendable, labour. Escalating career prospects, it should be added, had no meaning for such

~~WORKERS.~~

(iii) Recruitment

The precise modes of recruiting labour to the mines varied both over time and space and between different grades of employee. If the Singhbhum mining concerns, taken as a whole, had little difficulty in enticing unskilled tribal labour to their quarries, specific mines did encounter specific labour deficiencies and resorted to distinctive methods of recruitment. Broadly speaking, the options available reduced either to direct Company recruiting or to hiring contractors' labour.

When Companies recruited labour locally, they usually relied on word of mouth contacts. Those workers seeking jobs would simply muster strong at the Company's office early in the morning, and were enlisted according to the Company's daily requirements. To an extent this mode of hiring suited the local unskilled workers, particularly those who owned land and, "...did not, as a rule, seem to desire regular and continuous

work" (Adarkar p. 7). It suited the Companies too : workers hired on a 'permanent' basis were entitled to certain expensive privileges such as sick leave, privilege leave, bonus and so forth. Temporary workers were not so entitled. More importantly the companies were relieved of the necessity of securing many of the conditions of existence necessary for the continued reproduction of their labour power. The labourers' housing, educational, medicinal, and above all basic subsistence needs, were directly provided by the village economy. Far from the mining centres being growth poles one sidedly transmitting wealth to the surrounding rural environs, those rural environs were in fact subsidising the very existence of the mining concerns.

But there was always a necessary tension associated with the use of temporary workers. By definition their contribution was intermittent (more strictly, seasonal) and thus unsuited to meeting the ever more standardised labour requirements of the expanding mining companies. For this reason the companies increasingly looked towards the recruitment of permanent, if more expensive, labour forces. They did this in number of ways.

At the TISCO's Noamundi mine a permanent labour force was secured, very largely, by the provision of company housing, medical aid, basic educational facilities and so forth. This body of labourers comprised the 'permanent labour elite', recruited directly by the company mainly from the ranks of the locally landless. Yet even at the supposedly Fabian and paternalistic TISCO mines, a strong element of contract labour remained until 1959, when it was officially outlawed. Standing at 17.4 per cent in August 1939, the proportion of contract labour had increased during the war years to 35.7 in December 1944.⁹ Although this labour force was very nearly as stable and permanent as the Company's 'permanent' body, they received none of the privileges that accrued to the latter group of men and women.

Hard data on the exact strength of the contract labour force is again sporadic. The Annual Reports of the Chief Inspector of Mines do not begin to quantify the direct/contract composition of the workforce until 1961—two years

9. Adarkar (1945), p. 4.

after the claimed demise of contract labour at Noamundi. Yet even then, according to these reports, the proportion of contract labour averaged 37.6 per cent of the workforce in the Singhbhum mines between 1961-1969.¹⁰ Even allowing for seasonal and annual fluctuations, this clearly illustrates the continued importance of contractor's labour at the IISCO mines. Indeed the IISCO reliance on contract labour was well established.

The commonly accepted explanation for the heavy use of contract labour at Gua and Manoharpur runs like this. Gua in particular, and Manoharpur to a lesser extent, are both remote settlements, devoid of a ready supply of local labour from surrounding villages. Making matters still worse, the Gua and Manoharpur workforces were in the catchment areas not only of the Central Provinces manganese mines, but also of the many construction projects in post-Independence Bihar. Tempted by higher wages in these industries, labour drained away from the IISCO mines. This forced the Company to press through its retrenchment/modernisation plans, and to engage the services of contractors to procure a more permanent labour force from more distant villages in Singhbhum and beyond.

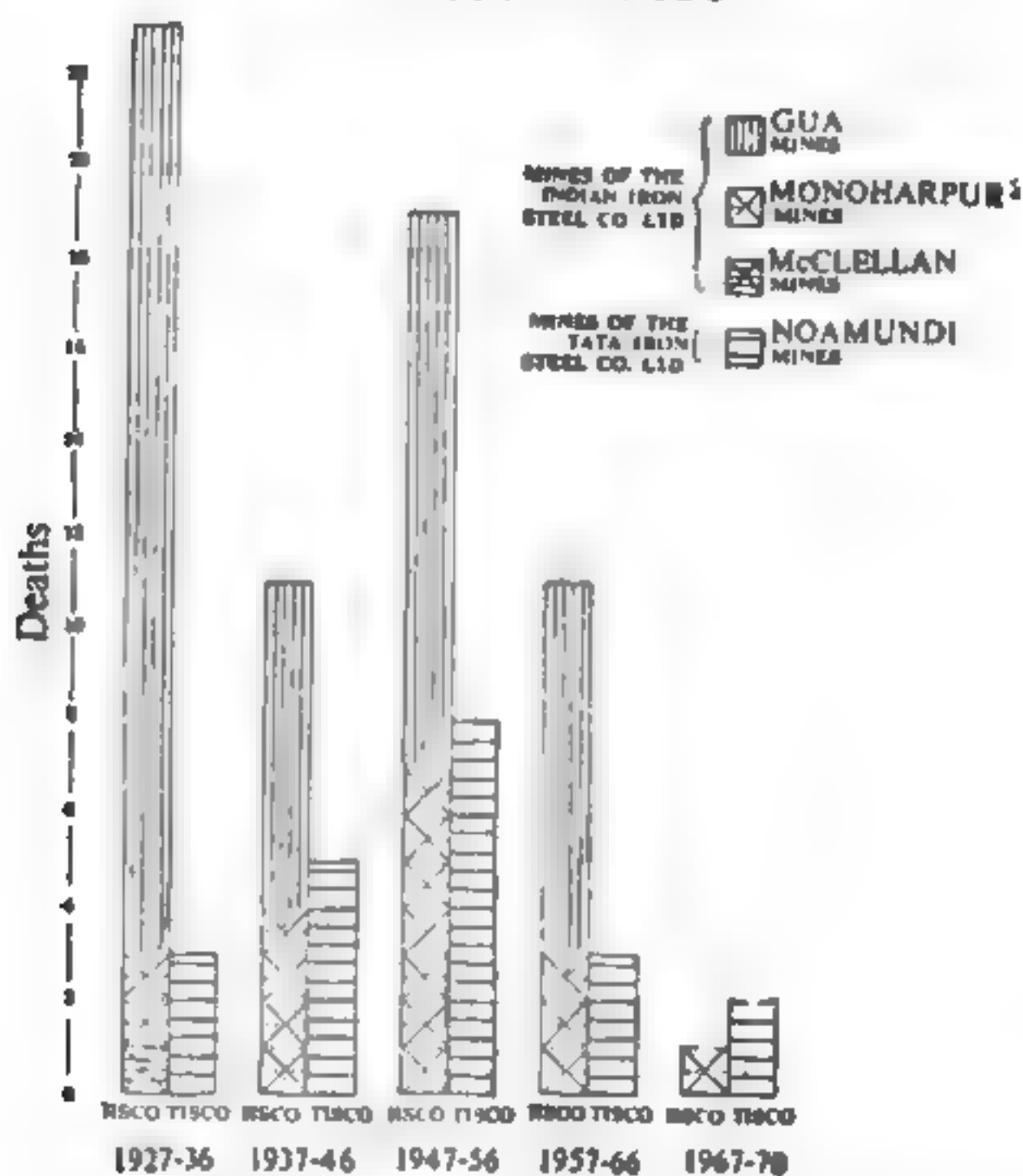
Of course there is more than a grain of truth in this account. The Gua mine, in particular, is the most remote in Singhbhum, and it was the first to push through extensive electrification and mechanisation proposals. But equally it is an explanation which neglects to comment either on the dreadful health and safety of the IISCO mines, or on the definite advantages that contract labour holds for management.

The accident record can be quickly dealt with : Figure 3 graphically portrays the comparative death rates in the TISCO and IISCO mines. Serious accident rates would reveal a similar, if not worse, pattern. The labourers, moreover, were certainly aware of these comparative safety rates and would act accordingly. In the coal mines, as Seth pointed out, "...if

10. Annual Reports of the Chief Inspector of Mines 1961-69.

two or three deaths occurred at a colliery 200 or 300 workers would leave overnight, without permission" (p55). Similar behaviour could be expected in the iron mines.

Figure 3: Deaths in the Singhbhum Iron Mines
TISCO Vs. IISCO



Nor does the straightforward distance-decay explanation lay proper stress on the benefits of contract labour for the Companies. Above all else contract labour, like temporary village-based labour, is cheap. Keenan opined that, "We have saved a lot of money by letting out contracts on the tender system. In fact the cost of mining ore at one of our mines has dropped from 14 annas to 7 annas (tonne), but I might tell you that I have found out, on enquiry, that the average wages of labour at one of our mines had dropped to 3/4 anna per day ...I cannot say that the wages that our contractors are paying is any credit to the TISCO...." No credit certainly, nor of any comfort to the workers. But humbug such as this cannot disguise the inherent advantages to the IISCO or the TISCO of

cheap contract labour. Moreover, as Majumdar correctly pointed out, "The indirect method of employment in mines, for example, where the labourers are recruited and engaged by the contractors, help the Companies to transfer their obligations to the former, so that even genuine grievances do not get redress and contractors always shield themselves by blaming the Companies concerned, and the latter escape by being impersonal in the matter of labour management" (p 320). Impersonal too in the matters of safety in the mines, wages, union rights and housing: the mine managers were absolved of direct responsibility in all these fields. In short the responsibility for (and expense of) the reproduction of significant numbers of the mines' labour supply—both village and contract—was conveniently placed out of the companies' domain. Instead there arose an arena of shared negligence; and it is the consequences of this that we shall examine next.

Wages and Conditions

Evidence of the failure of the local tribals fully to participate in the skilled and administrative ranks of the mining population—indeed evidence of that very local economy subsidising the mining and not vice-versa—might still be discounted by determined advocates of industrialisation if certain longer term benefits could be demonstrated (long run payoffs both nationally and locally as compared to the tribals' agricultural counterparts). The following section will examine such scenarios in detail. But once again the emphasis is on the uneven spread of such benefits.

(i) Conditions

Conditions in the mines were not enviable. For the majority the work itself was hard, monotonous and lengthy. Contractor's labour, in particular, would start work at the crack of dawn and continue for the best part of twelve hours. Moreover this work would be zealously supervised by the contractor or one of his sardars, thus imposing on the labour force a work discipline that was again convenient for management. The contractors too, more so than the companies' own recruiting

agents, continued to employ child labour in the mines. Even at the end of the 1950s Prasad and Sahay could report to the Government that, "...the boys and girls begin work at twelve years of age", specifying that this was contract labour (p1). Prasad and Sahay suspected too that the contractors were implicated in ... "a secret traffic in selling tribal girls to other States" (p20).

Female slavery was not the only abuse perpetrated by the contractors. More pressing on the average tribal were the simple day to day depredations inflicted on them by their employers. Depredations that were in keeping with the logic of the contract labour system. Because the contractors were increasingly in competition for a limited number of mining company contracts—with the result that they tendered to raise a given quantity of ore for less rupees than they might otherwise have done—the contractors were ever more bound to make their profits out of the blood, sweat and tears of the labourers. Thus the safety fences surrounding the treacherous quarries fell into disrepair or were simply stolen for firewood (Adarkar p19). So, no latrines were available at the mining faces, although they were provided at the Mines' offices. Thus there was an absence of adequate drinking water at the direct place of work. So, "the health of the people in the mines is never satisfactory" (Majumdar, 1950, p296).

Even if the companies' own labour was scarcely better off it is perhaps not surprising that the, "...workers most opposed the contract system which led to grave abuses" (Adarkar p3). These grievances first came to a head in the 1930s when, in the wake of earlier disturbances at Jamshedpur, labour unions spread to the Singhbhum iron mines. But if this newly acquired voice was frequently raised against the abuses of contract labour and against the general mining conditions, more frequently still was it raised in protest against deficiencies in what we might call the total social wage.

(ii) The Social Wage

Calculating time-series wage data for Indian industries is extremely difficult. On the one hand there are the usual problems of data availability and comparability (for example in

deflating the paid wage figures of a specific, backward, district, by price statistics gathered for a far larger spatial unit—to generate 'real wage' series). On the other hand there are the more uniquely Indian difficulties: most notably, the Indian industrial wage is a complex amalgam of paid wages, allowances, bonuses, profit shares, food concessions, cheap housing and so forth. In what follows it is only for presentation purposes that these elements have been disaggregated and analysed separately.

(a) Paid Wages

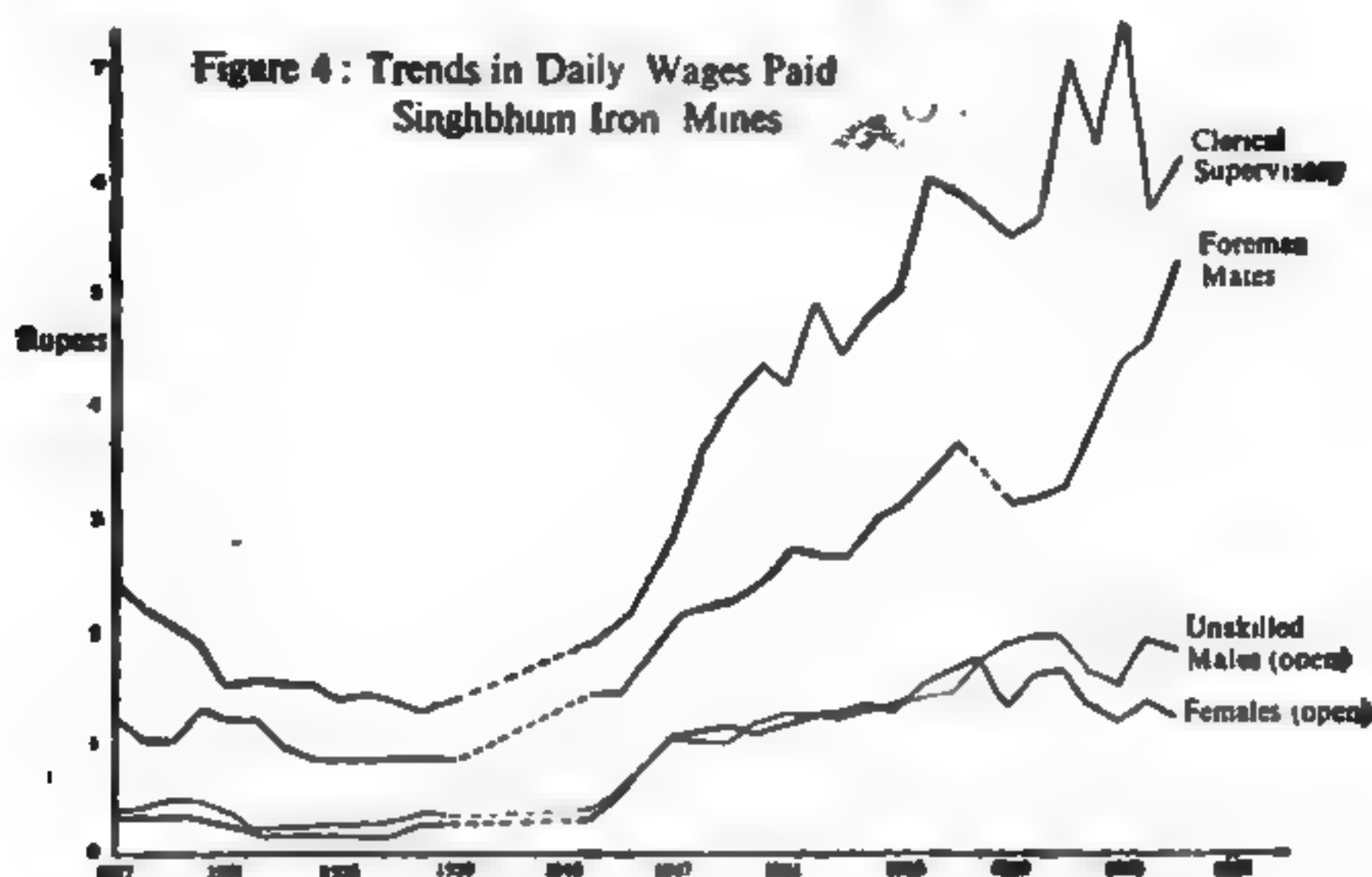
K. Subramanian and others have suggested that, on the whole mining wages in India have more than held their own since World War II, both with regard to prices and other industrial wages. This conclusion, however, is far harder to support when we disaggregate the mining statistics to focus on particular mining activities (coal, iron, mica etc), and to look at particular strata of the workforce within any mining activity.

As Figure 4 makes abundantly clear, the paid wages of the iron mines' administrative and supervisory cadres have increased at rates sufficient to **MAINTAIN A FIVE-FOLD RELATIVE DIFFERENTIAL** over the earnings of the unskilled and female members of the workforce. The **ABSOLUTE DIFFERENTIAL** between the wages of the two groups over the same period (1931-1963) has increased considerably. A comparison of the wages paid to the clerical and female components of the labour force in this period reveals that the absolute gap in earnings between the two has increased by 517 per cent. Similar calculations for the clerical/unskilled indicate a gap of 533 per cent, whilst the figures for the foremen & mates/females and the foremen & mates/unskilled are 388 and 393 per cent respectively. Making the point just as forcefully, the wage doled out to the typical (tribal) female quarry worker in 1963 was no greater than that paid to (non-tribal) foremen and mates in 1931.¹¹

11. Especially in the Ann. Reps. CH. Insp. Mines 1948-54 and 1957-58.

12. Which puts into proper perspective K. B. Subramanian's call for higher differentials and wage cuts, (1977) pp79-80 &289.

Of course the wage series data displayed in Fig. 4 refer to the average daily December wage which the employers claim to have paid. If anything, then, they tend to overstatement. More than this, even the disaggregated provided in these Annual Reports of the Chief Inspector of Mines, conceal certain important variations in methods of work and payment.



Face-cutters and drillers, for example, were generally paid on a piece rate system, whereas the female loaders were predominantly time rated. In greater detail still, the face cutters and drillers were paid their piece rate wages either according to a box system (post war TISCO), a tub rate (pre and post war TISCO), a cubic foot rate (IISCO) or a tonnage rate (rarer, TISCO and IISCO).¹³ The box rate system found most favour with the workers, for it was relatively easy for them to remember how many boxes of ore they had raised in a week. Which was not the case with the cubic foot rate system. When it is recalled that most face-cutters were contracted tribal labourers this assumes some importance: many

13. On average a labourer could hope to raise 1.5 boxes a day at a rate of 0-3-9 Rs/box in 1944 (0-2-6 Rs/box in 1939). For a tub (64 cubic feet) a worker received 1-5-6 Rs for hard ore in 1944 and 1 rupee for soft ore. At Gua the rate in 1944 was 1-9-0 per 100 cubic feet of soft ore and 1-12-0 Rs for hard. (Adarkar p11-12).

contractors were keen to exploit any ignorance the worker might display in these matters. A week, after all, was a long time.

The daily rated loaders, by contrast, faced fewer hassles directly related to the payment of wages. Nevertheless they had reason to complain bitterly about the length and inflexibility of their hours of work. Whilst, "Normal hours of work are 8 for company labour...under contractors the figure may be often as high as 12 hours" (Adarkar p15). With working days of this length, plus long journeys to and from the mines for the normal tribal female, it is hardly surprising that attendance at the mines was subject to sudden and sharp fluctuations. Had the mines' official paid more attention to the statutes of the maximum hours legislation, they might then have had less time for mindless grumbling about worker non-attendance and tribal indolence. But responsibility was not their strong suit—the grumbling, and the long hours, continued through the 1950s.

(b) Dearness Allowances

As we have suggested, paid wages comprise only one (admittedly important) element of the total industrial wage. It is thus conceivable that the escalating paid wage 'gaps' may have been softened, or reversed, by trends elsewhere in this composite figure. The most widespread such supplement to the basic wage is the dearness allowance—made over on an individual company basis.

The two parameters regulating the size of the dearness subsistence needs are met, but **WITHIN** a Company's supposed capacity to pay that level. Thus on a priori grounds alone it would be unreasonable to expect the dearness allowances to make any great difference to relative or absolute pay differentials. These allowances, though usually a larger element of the unskilled worker's total social wage than of his superior's, were designed simply to compensate employees, "...fully or partly for the loss in real earnings caused to them by increases in the cost of living from time to time. Whilst it might prevent deterioration in the economic conditions of workers it is **NOT** one of its functions to bring about any improvement in such condition"

(Subramanian p203). Indeed after a Labour Appellate Tribunal decision in 1951, dearness allowances have always been set below the level necessary to keep pace with inflation. In short, dearness allowances guaranteed only to keep "body and soul together" by the provision of a subsistence income (itself set below the International Labour Office's recommended minimum wage). They were not disguised real wage increases ; just the opposite, they were to stop the labour force falling apart on the job, literally.

Specific dearness allowances were the result of specific calculation procedures. In iron ore mining the relevant wage board made quarterly reference not to a local, but to an All-Indian Working Class consumer price index. Bearing in mind the body and soul necessity most companies would then attempt to relate their dearness allowances to what they considered to be the minimum level for the provision of a certain calorific intake (at quarterly prices). Thus, in 1955, the largest dearness allowance paid at the TISCO mines amounted to one rupee a day. At the IISCO mines the maximum allowance was approximately 7 annas/day, which was little higher than the minimum handout.

Clearly even this would have constituted a welcome increment to the basic paid wage. But it has to be stressed that such increments would not have boosted real wages over time (their function was the exact opposite) nor would they have done much to erode within mine differentials. Above all, dearness allowances were sops to inflation, payable to all members of the workforce, and were not specifically tailored to improving the position of the worker at the bottom of the pay ladder.

(c) Bonuses

If dearness allowances were formally open to all workers, many other bonuses were at the Company's discretion. So it was that in the TISCO and IISCO iron mines only 'Permanent' Company labour was entitled, "under the rules, to sick leave, privilege leave, bonus and other privileges" (Adarkar p7). But since qualification for the status of 'permanent' worker required regular and satisfactory attendance over a period of a year or

more, there was here an inbuilt discrimination against the mass of semi-agricultural, tribal labour. So long as the companies were assured of a certain quantum of regular labour—'permanent' or contract—they apparently had little interest in extending the 'privileges' of a small section of the workforce to the far larger pool of irregular, unorganised, lost out; not because of their supposed indolence, but because of the companies' action in segregating their workers.

(d) Housing, Education and Sanitation

No less than bonuses and dearness allowances, the provision of a modern housing, health and educational infrastructure has often been cited as one of the benefits of industrialisation. In the case of the TISCO, indeed, this has almost become part of the popular imagination. So much so that the town planning of Jamshedpur is seen less as the outcome of the peculiar economic needs of the Company in that formerly remote region, than as the product of the Company avowedly Fabian ideology. Yet it was precisely the size of the imported labour force that dictated the development of Jamshedpur a Company constructed town. At Noamundi, Gua and Manoharpur, the availability of plenty of contract and local/temporary labour meant that developments would not be so favourable in the mining settlements.

In the mines, for instance, housing was far from accessible to all, or even the majority, of the workforce. Only a minority—the skilled 'permanent' company workers again—were strictly entitled to free company housing. And even then, although "The superior staff were accommodated in pucca houses with reinforced concrete roofing and semi-pucca houses with corrugated sheet-roofing covered with country tiles" (Adarkar p17), the unskilled and semi-skilled 'privileged' workers were herded into one room tenements. Moreover whilst the compounds themselves had electric lighting, "in the coolie hutting" there was no such amenity (Adarkar p17). Nor in the nearby villages.

Contractors labour was still worse off of course. Even at Noamundi, generally deemed the most habitable compound,

"the contractors' quarters were found to be hopelessly bad". At Gua, "The quarters may be described as living dens unfit for human habitation" (Adarkar).

Finally, the local tribal labourers continued to bear their own housing costs. Their dwelling continued to be built in their own time with local materials—the gathering of which presupposed a number of activities which made their registration as 'permanent' workers ever more unlikely.

It ought to be said, before we close this section, that the above picture did not pertain throughout our period. At Noamundi, in particular, there have been a number of infrastructural improvements in the post-independence period—especially after the 1952 Mines Act was passed. Malaria has been eradicated, the colony electrified, schools and a hospital opened, and rest-sheds and creches introduced. Even the water supply has been filtered and chlorinated.

But not even these advances have been without their problems—the water-supply and anti-malaria campaigns have rightly been called into question by Pandeya—nor have they been equally available to all members of the workforce. Once again it is the compound dwellers who have benefited, not the local villagers. The spread effects—from mine to village—have been negligible. Even in 1961 Prasad and Sahay could sum up: "Noamundi is a mining station which has nothing to show for all the wealth that it produces. It is approached by an extremely bad road and the place has the look of a desert camp with a bazaar thrown in...It has the appearance of an overnight camp which is undecided, even after years, whether to leave the place or not" (p51). And the IISCO mines made no better an impression.

(e) Expenditure

The one area in which the local temporary village workers may have been better off than their urban workmates is the field of expenditure. Too often the compound based labourers were forced back into the captive markets (trade and credit) operated by the trader-cum-contractor. If the contractor couldn't always force his workers into debt to him (by the late

payment of wages for example,¹⁴) he could still be sure that the labourer's meagre pittance would trickle back to him via the high price retail stores that were his monopoly. In particular the contractors operated illegal liquor stands throughout the compounds. At Noamundi, where Government run outstill stores were in competition with the hard liquor outlets of the contractors, liquor retailed at 2 annas/bottle in 1955/36 and 4 annas/bottle in the late 1940s. At Gua however prices were not so 'depressed': liquor consistently sold at prices that were at least double those in Noamundi (Majumdar, 1950, p293). Even then drunkenness was a serious problem. For although alcohol was expensive it remained the chief means of relaxation in the mining colonies. Few alternatives existed, and fewer contractors were keen to introduce alternatives.

Summary and Conclusions

Though the greater part of the iron ore mining labour force was recruited from the local tribal population, it would be mischievous to suggest that the tribals unilaterally gained from this incorporation. In terms of employment the local men and women were disproportionately directed towards temporary, unprivileged and unskilled jobs. Whilst this clearly had something to do with the lack of relevant skills on their part, and perhaps a preference for seasonal employment, nevertheless it reflected just as much a failure to secure educational and apprenticeship provisions for the tribes, and a definite company interest in maintaining the village labourers as a segregated, cheap and unorganised workforce. In particular, the tribal village economy subsidised many of the costs involved in the production and reproduction of an industrial labour force—costs which would otherwise have fallen on the relevant mining company.

In terms of wages and conditions there is a similar need for a critical disaggregation of statistics and received opinions.

14. "Generally speaking, wages are paid a week after they are due in the case of weekly paid workers, and after ten days in the case of monthly paid workers" (Adarkar p15).

Only then does it become clear that different sections of the mining workforce not only received grossly unequal basic paid wages; they also benefited differentially in terms of their access to the facilities and allowances that comprised the wider social wage. Almost without exception, the tribal elements of the workforce failed to receive anything like the level of remuneration that their contribution to the general wealth warranted. The same can be said of the region as a whole.

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II

As It Exists

The Death of a Worker*

MANMOHAN PATHAK

From amidst the shoulders bent over the corpse, the backs inked with dust and sweat, a white eyed, red lipped countenance stirred. The man arose out of the silence and crossing the verandah of the hospital, came and stood near the door. A flash of rage and hatred caused sudden lined furrows on his face, then disappeared. He shook his head in refusal, then spoke in a slow but measured voice, "No saheb, I will not stamp my thumb print nor will a single man in my gang. We know this matter is not an accident. Our mate has been killed".

Both the seated questioners turned on him. He said no more.

"Who killed your mate"—manager Behl smiled through his anxiety.

"Saheb, do not ask us this. We shall take the corpse away. You have done what you had to".

"Yes, yes, take it away", said the manager, arising from his chair and coming nearer. "Look, we are no less grieved at Dukhu Mandal's death than you are. So many big officers

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have come to see the mine. All of them were sad at Dukhu's death. Mining is dangerous work. Who could have known that the roof would subside and bury Dukhu? And look, have you not worked for long in the mine? Has anything ever happened? Life and death are beyond man's control."

"You people were working in that shaft with him and you all observed the roof collapsing and killing Dukhu and your thumb prints are required of you as witnesses. This is what is written on this document."

The words were having a perverse effect on Rakhohari. The lines of rage and hatred began reappearing. The swine speaks with such slippery sweetness, he thought. Life and death are in God's hands. He died because the roof subsided. You are the swines responsible for the roof collapse, you are responsible for the mate being killed by it. The swine, everyday he would talk. He would tell Dukhu Mandal himself, produce more coal, fill twenty tubs, twenty five...Coal is in great demand in the country. Coal is the life of the country. Broaden the galleries, digging will become easier. He's been here only one year, the mate has worked here for ten years. He would often say, Rakhohari, what is happening is not right. Broadening the gallery will give us easier coal. Filling more tubs will give us more money. The Saheb's prospects will brighten, he may become a bigger saheb, but the roof will weaken and mark my words "some day the roof will collapse in number ten shaft and people will die. What is going on here is illegal."

He suddenly remembered the much-worn face of mate Dukhu Mandal. Incessantly wielding his pick in the inky darkness of number ten shaft he would occasionally stop and wipe black sweat with black 'gamcha'. In the cold light of the cap lamp, gliding along the shimmering walls of coal the mate would say, can you see how wide this shaft is getting to be? Then, gesturing towards the roof, he would ask, 'O.K., Rakhohari, can you guess how much weight rests on this roof?' Rakhohari would begin to estimate the depths which seemed to descend from the heavens, and would feel dizzy. But then the master would explain, the weight of the roof was supported by the walls on both sides of the tunnel, but if the tunnel were

made wider, the walls would retreat from the roof, and then the mountainous roof would subside.

The cap lamp had been in use here for many years now. At first they had worked with naked kerosene oil lamps. Once, after one of the Saheb's visits into the mine the mate had collected the men around him and had a good laugh. For some reason the saheb was very angry that day. The occasion was that he had seen some men smoking 'bidis', and this had set him off. The mate asked ironically why when there had been no danger mining in the smoke of the huge naked oil lamps, smoking bidis had suddenly become dangerous. And he had laughed heartily. All manner of sahebs had come and gone.

"Rakhohari, I've seen scores of sahebs in this very mine. English sahebs, Bengali babus, Punjabi sahebs with pugrees. But all of them knew only one thing, to scold, dismiss, and impose fines." Dukhu Mandal had often filled five tub's in a day single handed but the sahebs had never thumped his back nor encouraged him in any way. Dukhu did not want any encouragement either. He knew he had to cut coal and load it, in order to earn his wage. He knew he would be paid more if he cut more. But this wasn't the case with the mining contractors, pumpmen and the overman in-charges. They didn't have to dig for coal. They would be paid for the time they were there. Merely by daily attendance...it never seemed to matter how hard we worked. Sometimes the coal seam was so hard that even a gang of five or six men had a hard time of it filling a tub, but the money they got was merely for that single tub.

Rakhohari would listen attentively to all the mate used to say. What pitby things he said. He had experienced work through a variety of dangers. Whenever gas would seep into the shafts, a peculiar smell would spread, which the mate recognised. To dally even briefly would mean death by suffocation. How the miners would run, their 'gamchas' held to their noses, their heads bent low? And how difficult it is to run in a mine? The narrow, pitch black tunnels, the rails running through them, the occasional groundslip, the constantly dripping water, wooden shafts and pegs, the tubs, piles of coal. One

could slip any moment, and even Rakhohari had several bruises on his head.

The mate knew a great deal. He had worked in this mine a good ten years. And he knew just about everything of number ten shaft. Then why had he knowingly acquiesced in this wrong step? Why hadn't he refused to broaden the gallery? To snatch away the lives of so many of his men, why hadn't he refused? But refusal was not part of his nature. He had learnt the price of refusal in these ten years. A simple price: dismissal. That was why he appeared the most simple minded of the miners. His years of experience had taught him to remain foolish, since it was his foolishness that enabled him fill his stomach. Sometimes the mate would say foolish things even to Rakhohari.

O.K. Rakhohari, do you know why God has given men this 'Ghara', he would say, rubbing his belly, and then break into laughter. When he laughed his teeth would show, all white and glistening, through the surrounding darkness and his coalblackened face. Rakhohari gave a start. He saw the glistening teeth of his mate of number ten shaft.

Burra Saheb—the manager, had his hand on Rakhohari's shoulder, and was coaxing him, "put your thumb print on and then take leave. Go and do his last rites. You can use the company truck. And some money for the materials, besides."

But Rakhohari is not mate Dukhu Mandal. The mate knew the meaning of refusal, and could not refuse. Rakhohari could refuse, though he knew not its meaning.

Rakhohari turned around. Both his fists were clenched. Sweat oozed from the palms of his hands and they felt sticky. He wiped his hands on one of the pillars of the verandah, and looked out. Far ahead, from the wall of the tin roofed office building, chest height, like so many mouseholes, stared the several payment counters. Miners stood in long queues, clutching their cards in their hands. On pay day there would be a festive atmosphere around the office. Little oil lamps, sweets made of raw sugar, toys, rings, necklaces and bangles, 'pana cigarette-bidis, all were on sale, their vendors squatting here and there, flies buzzing about their goods. Hovering about the

queues like vultures were the moneylenders, their eyes devouring their debtors. Every now and then, when a miner would receive payment, barely would he stamp his thumb print and count his cash, when the moneylender 'mahajan' would pounce upon it, and after several calculations and subtractions, return a couple of rupees to his debtor.

Rakhohari sensed a disgusting familiarity with the scene. He would sign off Dukhu Mandal's death with a thumbprint, and the vultures would then descend upon his corpse. A hideous dance would ensue. Provident fund, gratuity, compensation, flesh, bones.... The unrecognizable face of mate Dukhu Mandal, pulverized by a mountain of coal, suddenly appeared before his eyes.

Rakhohari could not stay a moment longer. Dukhu Mandal had lain, dead, since last night. He would take him away, would not delay any longer. 'The company truck is available'—he would not use the company truck. He would carry him away on his shoulders. Rakhohari suddenly felt desperate. The swines would not even relinquish the corpse.

"Saheb, your work can go on even without my thumbprint. The colliery is full of thumb prints. I know when a man's wages can be lifted with another's thumb print, where is the problem in getting a witnesses' 'thumbprint'. Please don't force me, Saheb. Or else, Saheb, here's something you can do. Dukhu Mandal's thumb is intact. What better witness to his own death by accident?"

As he spoke, Rakhohari felt fury gush into his veins. The ominous chit-chit-chit of the wick before it ignited the dynamite.

But then he returned to the stairs of the verandah. Nimai, Chandu and the rest of his fellows stood beside him.

No one spoke. The sad, sullen faces of the miners, grey as the smoke filled atmosphere of the colliery, were quickened by the boiler-like heat in Rakhohari's eyes. An unspoken decision was arrived at in their eyes. They lifted the corpse on the string bed on which it lay, left the hospital gates behind them and caught a footpath out of the colliery. The wild bushes swallowed them up.

The chairs were dumbfounded. Actually, neither of them had the faintest inkling that this could happen. An accident is hardly an accident in a mine. It is a perfectly normal occurrence. Hardly a year passes in which there aren't two or three hundred accidents in the coalfields. Often enough several workers die together. This was but a single life. Gas, fire, flooding, and, most often, roof collapses caused accidents. And after all how much attention could be paid to safety? Safety and production never go together.

Manager Behl was troubled. No manager wants accidents to happen, miners to die. What can he possibly gain from an accident? [On the contrary, his troubles increase. Inspections, inquiries, but then, to be afraid of them is no way to run a colliery.

Then there was the internal problem. The safety maintenance work was done mainly by Contractors' labour. Contractors were often enough union leaders as well. To discover faults and malpractices in their work was to ask for trouble. Angering them could mean a strike. They could cause a dozen irritations. Where did that leave one? [Abuses from the workers, letters from the higher-ups. "Industrial relations are deteriorating. Production has stopped".

Production was everything, it was even ones' self-protection. Dammit, one's whole career depended on 'production'. Wherever one went the question was the same—what was the production in the colliery you worked in? This controlled, one's career. Does anyone ever ask you how many accidents occurred, how many lives were lost? And then—don't accidents occur everywhere? Aeroplanes crash. Ships sink. Everyday buses and taxis collide. Accidents are accidents. What happens when trucks and taxis are involved in accidents. Nothing much happens to the drivers. At most their licences are cancelled.

But at this point Manager Behl felt afraid. What if this matter stained his certificate? If these people refused to stand witness and the newspapers made some loose comments? Then he would be in a fix. Manager Behl looked at Netaji—the Union leader—with frightened eyes. No, this would not do. A minor accident would not be allowed to spoil his career.

No, something or other would have to be done. The Netaji straightened his cap. For a long while he had sat silently, at a loss for words. He had begun with intent to paper over matters in his interest, and now here he was, confronted with an entirely new situation. He, after all, was on contract to speak and decide for the workers. Rakhohari's behaviour had left him speechless. He hadn't even been able to summon up initiative to intervene. But this would not do. Something would just have to be done. If workers began to decide such matters on their own then where would that leave Netaji? He could fix that swine Rakhohari in a day. Could have him wiped out by his hired strongmen. But he had a strong sense of chronological delicacy. Had he embarked on such a course all the workers would explode. No, he would have to coolly think out a plan of action.

Behl saheb also implicitly trusted Netaji. Hand on trustworthy shoulder, he stood up. Together they climbed into the car. As it drove off, Netaji spoke suddenly.

"Behl saheb, tomorrow there will be a strike in your colliery".

"Strike?" the manager recoiled.

"Sahed, you have not yet made any arrangement for providing water to the workers' colony. The thatched rooves of their huts are coming to bits. No attention has been paid to their maintenance".

"Fine, fine, I understand."

And the next day there was indeed a strike. Netaji's men had gone into the workers colonies at night and spread the message. Nobody had so much as asked what the strike was about, nor was such questioning customary.

When Rakhohari and his colleagues returned from the burning ground night had fallen. They were glad to hear of the *hartal*. They even felt a certain respect for Netaji. A strike on the death of a fellow worker....

The mine was closed. None of the miners went to work. The usual hiss of the haulage boiler was absent. All the workers

congregated in the porch of the colliery office. Placards declared forth slogans. Fulfil our demands. Manager Behl, resign; Supply Water to the Worker's Colony. Repair our Houses. People were shouting slogans loudly. Rakhohari, too, heartily joined in.

All at once there is a flash of crisp white clothing and Netaji stands up, above the crowd. "Inquilab zindabad !* Comrades, today we are on strike, and shall remain on strike, until our demands are met. Are the workers' colonies fit places to dwell for human beings ? We ask the management—are the workers animals ? Do not even animals require water to live ? You all know over what distances our wives and sisters have to carry water for the children. I ask the management—can you not instal a single tap in the colony ?"

Netaji vociferates with zest. The crowd is excited. But Rakhohari experiences a cooling-off of his excitement. He is unable to understand whether the strike is over mate Dukhu Mandal's death or over drinking water facilities. He listens again, "...I do not want you to remain unsatisfied. It is not possible for all of us to go inside together, so I am asking Comrades Rakhohari, Chabila Dusadh, and Ramsingh to come with me to discuss our demands with the management."

As he beckons, the three men get up from the crowd and go with him into the manager's room. The crowd has thinned.

The mangement is stern. This strike has been called totally without notice, and is therefore quite illegal. The management have decided that all those on strike will be dismissed. Troublemakers will be handed over to the police. The police have been called.

Netaji seems to be cooling off very fast. The heat with which he had entered the room seems suddenly to have evaporated. He is now looking towards Rakhohari, Ramsingh and Chabila. After barking on for a while, Manager Behl changes his stance.

"Only yesterday there was an accident in our colliery, and today you people go on strike. Dukhu Mandal was a hard

* 'Long Live Revolution!'

working miner. We all should take a lesson from his hard work and honesty, not go on strike. We sympathise with you, but you, too, must cooperate with us, and understand our problems."

Netaji now seems to be agreeing with everything the Manager is saying. Manager Behl opens the drawer, takes out the accident report document, and lays it on the table. Along with the stamp-pad, he pushes it towards Ram Singh, Chabila and Rakhohari.... "You must cooperate, with us...you have struck work, and not a stones worth of production have we had today. After all, you have lost as much as we. But we have been gracious. We have not dismissed you."

Turning now towards Rakhohari the manager spoke, gently coaxing. "Rakhohari, you were in pain yesterday. We all suffer when someone close to us dies. That is why I said nothing to you yesterday. Here, put your thumbprint on this." Chabila and Ram Singh had by then done their duty. "Arrangements for water will be made. I am putting your Netaji in charge of maintaining your huts so that you will no longer have cause for complaint...."

Rakhohari feels himself besieged from all sides. He cannot understand anything anymore. But from within him there rises a boiling rage at all this. A rage of abuse. Curses fill his being. Still, he finds nothing to say. "You swines..." his stammered breath permits just so much, as he gets up in a whirl and opening the door, storms out of the office. Pursuing him are the police, and the sticks—of Ram Singh and Chabila Dusadh.

The Bonded of Palamau*

SUDIPTO MUNDLE

Ram Lakhan sold himself for ten rupees. That was about 18 years ago. He cannot place the date more accurately. He was then hardly five years old. His parents had died. He had nothing to eat and nothing to wear. So he appealed to the mercy of a village *bania* to lend him ten rupees. The *bania* who traditionally doubles as a *mahajan*, complied with his wishes. Ram Lakhan, the orphan, was given a loan of ten rupees to start a new life. Only one condition was imposed. The labour of his life belonged exclusively to the *bania* till such time as Ram Lakhan had paid off his ten rupees with interest. Ram Lakhan had become bonded. Ever since that day he has been tied to the *bania-mahajan*. His labour has been reserved to be used by the *mahajan* for whatever purpose the latter found most convenient.

The story of Ram Lakhan's life is not exceptional. It is important precisely because it is representative. Ram Lakhans are to be found in large numbers in village after village, among the parched fields and harsh Chota Nagpur terrain of Palamau and other districts of Bihar. The bonded labourer, or *sevakia* as he is locally called, invariably emerges from the ranks of the

* This is a slightly revised version of an article which appeared in *Economic and Political Weekly*, XI (18), May 1, 1976.

Chutte majdoor (free landless labourer) and *garib kisan* (poor peasant). Both the *majdoor* and the *garib kisan* are heavily dependent on the ruling trinity of the village ; the landlord who now appears as the *bania* (merchant) and now again as the *mahajan* (moneylender). The *majdoor* and the *kisan* till the lands of this unholy trinity, usually for a *Majoori* (wage), for about six months of the year when there is work on the land. Palamau being a parched district, the second crop is a small one and much of the land lies fallow.

The wage paid in season is remarkably invariant. Wherever you go it is about the same, two to three *kachhi* seers, i.e. about one kilogram of grain. The grain is often an inferior item like *makai* or *gundli*. If the family needs to consume a little oil or salt, or somebody needs money for a vest (they can seldom afford the luxury of a shirt) then the daily grain wage has to be foregone for an equivalent money wage.

During the lean months things are much worse. The *majdoor* and the *garib kisan* look for employment in public works. Alternatively, they turn to the forest, carrying head-loads of firewood, fruits and other forest products for a pittance. The fabled *mohua* comes into its own in these months. The sweet scented orange flowers are collected in the forest. Part of it is sold. The rest is consumed at home in every conceivable form. The flowers are eaten raw, they are boiled, and they are fermented to produce a sweet, fragrant, wine. The poor have little else to live on.

Here one does not need to measure calorie intakes and statistical poverty lines to find the minimum level of subsistence. The unholy trinity has taken care of that. Through trial and error over the decades the bare minimum for survival has been worked out with great precision. Two seers *kachhi* for a day's labour. On the average this just about keeps a labouring family alive to perform its labour. Records going far back into the colonial period speak of the same wage. This subsistence wage is also the great divide between freedom and bondage. The slightest nudge, the smallest deviation in expenditure, is enough to shove them into the eager clutches of the *mahajan*. A marriage, an illness, even a death. These are the origins of irrevocable bondage.

Of the 60 cases investigated in villages from different blocks of Palamau, most of the *sevakias* were formerly landless labourers who sometimes did not even have their own homestead land. The others were poor peasants owning up to 1.5 or 2 acres of land who also earned their livelihood mainly through wage labour. In four cases the *sevakia* had formerly been a small sharecropper. All the *sevakias* came from the humblest social origins, belonging invariably to a scheduled caste or tribe. Most of them belonged to the Bhuiya, Dusadh, Nagesia and Chamar communities. The rest were Parhaiyas, Lohars, Kanhars, Ghasis, Mundas and Oraons. One was a Christian.

Most of them bonded themselves for a loan taken for his own marriage or that of his son or daughter. This is one of the most ironic aspects of the *sevakia* system of Palamau. On the very same day that a man takes his bride and begins a new life he simultaneously gives up his miserable freedom to begin an even more miserable life of bondage. Apart from marriage, last rites on somebody's death or an illness seem to have been the other main occasions on which the *mahajan* was approached for a loan on bondage. The deep strength of custom which compels a man to bond himself for life for a single futile feast is completely inexplicable to the urban mind.

Once bonded, the *sevakia* becomes captive labour for the *mahajan*. If the latter is mainly a landowner then the *sevakia* will work on the land. If the *mahajan* is also a merchant then the *sevakias'* labour will probably be divided between the fields, the shops and the bullock cart. The only obligation of the *mahajan* is to give *banhi* to the *sevakia*. This is an obligation as much to himself as to the *sevakia* because *banhi* is that necessary product which has to be given to the *sevakia* to keep the supply of labour alive. *Banhi* for the bonded labourer corresponds to *majoori* for the free labourer. However his daily wage is somewhat lower, and the length of the working day somewhat longer, for the *sevakia* such that his earnings per hour [of labour is less than that for the free labourer. On the other hand the *sevakia* gets employment for a larger number of days during the year so that on the whole his situation is not much different from that of the free labourer.

This is a feature which stands out sharply to the outside observer. The difference to the labourer between his miserable freedom and his miserable bondage is small. It is the same level of consumption. The same conditions of living. The same back-breaking life sapping toil year after year. The difference is only in relation to the *mahajan*. In one case the *mahajan* has captive labour at a lower wage rate reckoned by the hour. In the other case the miserable wretch may desert him during the season for a few annas more elsewhere.

But the chances of even this happening is limited in the oppressive milieu of the village. What operates at least as powerfully as economic compulsion is the premanent fearsome presence of the unholy trinity and its bullies. Whether in their homes, or in the fields, both bonded and free labour are always within close reach of the dreaded trinity which dominates the village and the surrounding fields. As one landlord said confidently, "sala jaega kahan"? The dominance of brute force is brought home vividly in the tragedy of a surviving widow. She came from a village which is dominated by the district president of a powerful political party. He has dispensed even with the formal excuses for holding captive labour. His bullies simply procure labour through beating and intimidation. This form of labour is called *dharbaru*. In some quarrel the landlords' bullies had murdered the man and his son. They had beaten up the woman too. But she still had life in her to limp to a bonded labourers' camp to register a complaint with the magistrate.

The village elite will avoid the risk of violence if it can make sure of cheap captive labour through other means. Hence the *sevakia* system. Though in principle the *sevakia* is bonded only till such time as he has paid back the debt, in reality he gets tied for ever. Because the *banhi* he gets has been settled, through the refinement of the time, at just enough to keep him alive there is never any surplus to pay back the original sum borrowed. To make his bondage doubly sure the *mahajan* may charge him a fantastic interest. The actual interest rate or the way the total amount of principal plus interest multiplies is of little consequence. The *sevakia* does not know what interest

rate he has to pay, nor is the *mahajan* interested in getting back full principal plus interest. In fact that is the last thing he wants. All he wants to ensure is that the total amount of debt should rise so phenomenally (through interest, not fresh loans) that the *sevakia* can never set himself free. He is almost captive labour.

The closeness of the formally bonded *sevakias* and the notionally free *chutte majdoor* is also reflected in their common aspirations. If you ask the *sevakia* to relate his wildest dreams, he will talk of joining the ranks of his free compatriots, the *chutte majdoor*. What they will both dream of is a little plot of land, a pair of bullocks and may be a pig and some poultry. These are the assets of the middle peasant whom one occasionally encounters in scattered corners of the district. The middle peasantry is their dream because the middle peasantry is relatively resilient to the grinding pressures of the ruthless trinity. Owning up to ten acres or more in areas with parched, rocky land; the produce of the middle peasant is largely consumed at home. Only a small surplus is left over for sale since productivity is very low in Palamau. In the main, the middle peasant cultivates his own land. Those with relatively large holdings lease out a part of it to sharecroppers. Those with relatively small holdings lease in some land on a sharecropping basis. But by and large the middle peasantry is self-sufficient and therefore resilient. Only under abnormal conditions such as drought or personal calamity do they get exposed to the greedy clutches of the *mahajan*. Not that the oppressive village elite leaves them alone. They constitute the limiting constraints against the greed and self-aggrandisement of the elite and as such the elite is always at war with the middle peasantry. Their constant endeavour is to whittle away the land of the middle peasantry through legal trickery, bribes, intimidation and forced occupation. The ultimate weapon of the middle peasant is extreme and desperate self-deprivation to retain his independence. When even this fails his resilience collapses. He too joins the ranks of the *garib kisans*, the *chutte majdoor* or perhaps even the *sevakia*.

Unleashing their greed and oppression against weak and resilient alike are the members of the unholy trinity. They

dominate the surrounding fields and hovels from their white-washed bungalows through cunning, the power of wealth and sheer brute force. The trinity is sometimes literally no more than three or four persons in the smaller villages. In this part of Bihar they are mainly Brahmin and Rajput landlords and Baniyas who originally came from the neighbouring Sone valley and colonised Palamau during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The local literati of Daltonganj, the district headquarters, claim that Palamau, became a hideaway for the plains people after the collapse of the 1857 anti-colonial war. It is also possible that with the construction of the Sone canal in the late 19th century some landowners were edged out in the subsequent differentiation and moved to virgin pastures in the Palamau hinterland. The Baniya has traditionally doubled as the *mahajan*. But for lack of other investment opportunities, he has also developed interests in land. The Brahmin and Rajput landlords on the other hand, have principally colonised the land and taken to moneylending only as a subsidiary function to ensure the availability of cheap captive labour—the *sevakias*. This distinction reflects itself in the pattern of land holdings. When the *mahajan* who holds *sevakias* is a Brahmin or Rajput landowner he will usually be holding from 50 up to a 100 acres of land. If on the other hand the *mahajan* is a Baniya, he may have just as many *sevakias* but his landholding will usually be no more than 20 acres.

Apart from the Brahmins, Rajputs and the Baniyas, a few Muslims have also moved into the ranks of the unholy trinity, though the Muslim community is mainly made up of middle peasants. One freak case was noted where an Oraon tribal had become a major landowner and he himself was employing two *sevakias*. But the landlords of Palamau, whether Brahmin or Baniya, Rajput or Muslim, are only moderately wealthy. The great Junker estates of north Bihar are conspicuous by their absence. The wealth of these recent colonisers of Palamau is no where in proportion to the intensity of their exploitation of the local poor. Partly this is explained by their origin. Partly by the low productivity of the soil and the harsh Chota Nagpur terrain.

Caught between the twin blades of a harsh land and a cruel

trinity the landless labourers and poor peasants have been gradually sinking into indebtedness and bondage. It is interesting to note that the phenomenon of bondage is relatively recent and growing. Of the sixty cases investigated only two persons were found who had been *sevakias* for 30 or 40 years. The large majority had fallen into bondage as recently as ten, seven or three years ago. How long will the labouring poor continue suffering the stranglehold of the wily rich? Is there a way out? What can the *sevakias*, *majdoors*, and *garib kisans* do to help themselves? These became the central issues of heated discussion for a group of former *sevakias* who came together at a camp organised in village Semra near Daltonganj in late March.

Certainly there seemed to be an air of optimism. Ever since the plight of the bonded gained national focus the government has passed a range of legislation on bondage, indebtedness and the payment of minimum wages in agriculture. The machinery of field administration in Palamau has also been energetically geared to their cause by the Deputy Commissioner. Certainly these are new experiences and new opportunities for the labouring poor of Palamau. They have stirred new hopes. But ultimately the problem is neither legal nor administrative. It is economic. The government can neither employ the labouring population nor support them with assets except for small periods and in limited numbers. They remain dependent on the landowners of Palamau. But if they are dependent on the landowners, the landowners are no less dependent on them. If the rural poor can discipline themselves against senseless expenditure on marriages, deaths and drink; if they can organise themselves into mutual aid co-operatives; if they can confront the monopoly of land with their own monopoly of labour; then perhaps things may begin to look up.

Three Women of Chas*

NIRMAL SENGUPTA

Mani

If you have travelled on the bypass road leading towards Bokaro, you may have seen, sitting at the Lambakoli crossing the old woman Mani Baurin. Once upto a time she was quite beautiful to look at, but now old age has left its mark on her whole body, with the skin having sagged and the sparkle in her eyes extinguished forever. Even so, she would not have seemed so wretched but for the fact that of late life had doubled its burden on her.

It is rather difficult to name precisely, what Rameshwar Singh's relationship is to Mani. He is not her husband ; for they were never married. How could they have ? After all, marriages between higher and lower castes are forbidden. Some people use the notion of "concubinage", to refer to this relationship. But then, ought the humaneness of this relationship to be degraded by the vulgarity of such a term ? Observe for yourself how it came to pass.

Had you seen Rameshwar Singh thirty years before this story begins, you would have seen a well fed and healthy young

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man, prosperous, and kept busy with the work on his fields. He possessed a little land in Patna district, was married, and the father of a small child. Life seemed simple and well-set enough, but....

A dark cloud covered in the corner of the sky, portent of a storm which was to destroy his placid life. His wife fell seriously ill. Medicines were of no avail. One day her eyes were shut in death.

But his misfortune did not end here. The bereavement was too much for his motherless child. It, too fell ill and ultimately, went weeping, to join her. In Rameshwar's world there was now no one left to call his own.

The heavy hearted Rameshwar left his village and stumbled through life for many years. Sleeping and waking, eating and drinking, all were left to the vagaries of fortune. His vagrant existence made him a victim of asthma. He did not, even then, feel inclined to return to his village and begin leading that old life again. He was surviving on odd jobs picked up nearabouts where he lived, on the outskirts of Bokaro ; sometimes a little business, occasionally working for a contractor. When his relations from the village would ask him to marry again he would fob them off, using his asthma as a pretext.

But he felt the pain of loneliness. And so he asked Mani Baurin of Chas to stay with him, thinking, after all, this isn't as rigid a bond as marriage, if she wants to be rid of a diseased man she can always leave me. This happened twenty five years ago.

But Mani Baurin changed his whole life. She created a home for this sad and lonely man, helped him forget his pain, even gave him the strength to overcome his disease. Over time Rameshwar began to love her. The kept woman became his life companion. He took up a contractor's job in right earnest, sometimes in Ranchi and sometimes in Durgapur. He settled for good now away from home, and only rarely visited his village. His high caste relations would not see anything wrong in a man sleeping with a low caste woman, but would definitely consider it sinful for him to take such a women into his home and give her the status of wife. They did indeed, find him thus contaminated, and now, without eating cowdung and paying

due obeisance to the pundits, how could he regain social and caste acceptability? Rameshwar decided to adopt the Bauri community as his own. He bought a little land and thought it a good place to while away his old age.

Bauri society does not possess the hollowness and hypocrisy of caste-Hinduism. It knows how to accord respect to a true human relationship—the Bauris do not hanker after caste, ritual, and meaningless incantations. Mani had an honourable status in Rameshwar's eyes, and so too, did he, and their loving relationship have such status in the eyes of Bauri society. For some twenty years Mani spent a happy life. Whatever Rameshwar earned, he would entrust to her. With his acquiescence, she helped out many of her poorer brethren. When the Bokaro steel plant entered construction Rameshwar came there in search of petty contracts and there began living with the rest of Mani's community. If the rituals and laws of marriage possess the strength that is claimed for them, ought they not to make marital relations as sweet and lasting as those between Mani and Rameshwar?

Mani's story does not end here. His asthma has caught up with Rameshwar in his old age. His income has dried up, and he is incapable of earning.

For some years now Mani has run the household by selling the ornaments which he had given her. Mani now has only one, incessant preoccupation: to look after Rameshwar.

The upper-caste people declare the Bauris are a fallen community. Prostitution has been rampant amongst them for years. Such people see the world through the filthy prism of their own minds. For them, women such as Mani are "concubines", whereas those men, who, having gone through the ritualized exercises of marriage, leave their wives and become lechers, nevertheless retain their clean and holy status. For Rameshwar they prescribe penance, but for the lecherous rascals they have not even a word of criticism.

The ideals and practices of Bauri society are far loftier than those of the hypocritical Hindus. The Bauris accord a status to truth. They will honour Mani, but the upper castes could not find it in themselves to honour Rameshwar. To the Bauri society there is no necessity of ritualized custom. It is open and

honest behaviour that it respects. Bauri women honour even those partnerships which are called concubinage by some, but the upper caste people, barring a few like Rameshwar, look upon them as mere relations for fun and enjoyment. Who then can be considered civilized—the Bauris or the upper castes ?

Sarasati

There is a difference between a prostitute and a concubine. The latter maintains a relationship with a single man, the former with several. There never used to be prostitution in Bauri society. The practice arose when the War brought the presence of the army, when Chas grew into a township, and when the Bokaro factory came up. Thousands of workers from far away places came to Bokaro to sell their labour. The government and the capitalists built factories to exploit this labour. But none of the other needs of the workers' lives were taken care of. There were no houses for families to be brought in, no scope of recreation nor other means of entertainment. This is why many of them go to prostitutes to relieve their boredom and loneliness. Today in the Bauri and Muchi colonies there are about three hundred and fifty prostitutes. A majority of them belong to different castes, but they live among the Bauris. The higher caste men utilise their services, but do not let them live in their own colonies.

Sarasati is one such young woman. This is not her real name. We shall not reveal her village either, but it is very near the steel city. Sarasati was born some eight or ten years prior to the birth of the Bokaro factory. She is one of her parents' four daughters. Her parents would labour all day and yet the family never could have a full meal.

When she was a child, Sarasati would spend the day scampering about the neighbourhood. Her parents had to go to work—who had time to look after the daughters ? Sarasati was fascinated by the trucks which used to ply on the highway. When she grew a little older, she even tried climbing into them once or twice, and sometimes ended up with a slap given by a driver or a *khalasi*.

The old township of Chas-Bokaro underwent rapid change. A huge plant was coming up. Tall buildings appeared on the ground which was once plain. And Sarasati's contours, too were changing. The playful child with scanty clothes and loose hair was gradually maturing into a woman. The usual torn clothes were no longer sufficient for her adolescent body. The men going past on the highway would no longer do so with nonchalance. They would now pay her the occasional sidelong glance.

The innocent girl remained for a long time unaware of this change. Child-like, she could still stare at the traffic, standing by the roadside for hours. These days she has been happier. A good many friendly drivers have appeared on the route. Some of them would now and then even offer a free drive. The child in her knew not, that it wasn't the times that had changed so much as she herself.

On one such day, Sarasati climbed into a truck full of Contractor's labourers. The truck went along to the Damodar river-bed and stopped there for the day. The coolies began loading it with sand. Sarasati played with the sand, exchanged a few words with the driver. The evening came on, and the men began returning home. The driver paid them their daily wages. Surprise of surprises—he put a rupee into Sarasati's palm as well. He said, here's your wage. Come with us every day from tomorrow.

Sarasati danced her way home that night. Every day she joined the driver on his truck to earn her daily wage.

Slowly the truth dawned on her. The driver never asked her to work. After parking his truck he would find himself a place to rest and take her with him. Just before she went home each evening he would give her wage. And thus did she acquire some worldly wisdom. On the one hand, relief from the hunger and hard labour of the rest, and on the other...well, she, too, felt the passions of youth. Of course, there was the question of losing one's honour. But amidst such poverty, what, after all, is honour? Her sense of shame, which was all the little girl had to lose, was soon forgotten.

Good food and clothes quickly changed Sarasati's appearance.

In comparison with other women she was very attractive. Her name spread. Drivers began competing with one another over her. She left the first one, and began taking up with ever-newer companions. Often she would stay away from home for two or three days. She was not yet seventeen. The ties with her village and poor parents were loosening. One day she left home for good with a Punjabi truck driver. He was a Sardar and lived alone. He began keeping Sarasati with him. Eighteen months elapsed in this way before the Sardar finally decided to go back to the Punjab.

That was the day Sarasati took herself to the prostitutes quarter in Chas. After the driver left her, where would she live, how would she eat? She had never formed the habit of hard labour, either. And meanwhile, she had gotten used to eating well, using a little good soap and oil, and wearing good clothes. Labouring would not bring her that kind of life, she had only one option. She became a full-fledge prostitute. She was still beautiful. A Bauri in Chas gave her a room to live in her house, and began soliciting customers for her as well. She spent her nights in hotels, sometimes in private rooms in Bokaro town. Half her earnings she had to turn over to the old Baurin. In three years the old woman built herself a proper brick house with Sarasati's earnings.

Finally Sarasati tired of it all. Over the years she had acquired maturity of mind. She thought of the future, sometimes grieved over the course of her life. She returned home once, and gave her parents some money.

She quarrelled with her old landlady over money, and left her home to go and live with a Punjabi. She became his concubine.

I only saw her once during this phase. Perched behind a scooter, clad in a chiffon sari, and sun-glasses on her nose, she was difficult to recognise. I now hear that the mechanic has decided to go home, and take Sarasati with him. Who knows whether she will now have a relatively contented life, like Mani or whether this Sardarji, too, will turn her out of his house. And, if he should do so, who knows where will she go? How will she live?

Bijli

The old Madam was a Baurin. She had two sons and two daughters-in law, both about Sarasati's age. The old woman solicited customers for Sarasati, but kept her own two daughters-in-law away from these professions with great care.

Outsiders think that prostitution is very common among the Bauris. But this is very far from the truth. Let alone the others, even the behaviour of this old 'dalal' women do not confirm the prejudices about the Bauri community. In the year 1961, the Bauri youth had stamped out prostitution from the Chas Mohalla. But when the factory was started, the problem again cropped up and together with the expansion of the factory and the establishment of the township, the problem has grown to such an extent, that the Bauri youth cannot stop it any more. But even then the Bauri youth do not allow prostitution anywhere also outside 'Lambakuli's mohalla' even to this day.

What is the character of a common Bauri women? If you want to know this let me tell you the story of Bijli Baurin. But this does not have the flavour of a real story—neither the romance of Mani's life, nor the drama of Sarasati's. The story of Bijli Baurin is only a dry narrative of the day-to-day struggle of life.

Bijli is not yet thirty years of age. But even at this age she is a widow. She has two small children. In order to alleviate the loneliness of life, Bijli can of course remarry. But then who will look after her children ?

Bijli has not remarried. She is trying to build her whole future around her children. The difficulties are staggering. As soon as it is five o'clock in the morning, Bijli goes out to work—to Bokaro town, three miles distant. She works in three quarters of the town. From twelve to two in the afternoon she sits and rests on an empty stomach in the parks of the city and by the time she returns home, after finishing her afternoon chores, it is already dark. What will her children eat ? Who will look after them ? A neighbour looks after them, but that is for part of the time. The youngest child still drinks mother's milk. But then she sees her mother only in

the evenings. And then, how much milk can a hungry and thirsty mother produce ?

Bijli works during the day, and cries at night. Will this painful struggle ever end ? She represents in herself the majority of Bauri woman. She, too, is good to look at. Many have tried to tempt her with easier means of sustenance. But she hasn't given in. A babu in one of the homes she works in, thought her easy prey, and made a move in that direction. Despite her hunger and her poverty she left his house that month.

There may be ten Manis in Bauri society, and a hundred Sarasatis, but Bijlis there are in thousands. Their's is a struggle to exist, to feed and clothe their children, and to maintain their self-esteem. And they are struggling all alone, every day.

If Bijli were to ever lose courage where shall we all bide our shame ?

III

Basis of Unity

Historical and Cultural Basis of Jharkhandi Nationality

BASANT KUMAR MEHTA

Jharkhand has preserved its relics of all different ages. Even in a period a lakh years earlier, human beings used to live in his area. None of the communities who reside in Jharkhand at present can claim that they are the true descendants of those primitive people. A study of the Brahminist literature including vedas indicate that in the eyes of the Brahmins there was no distinction among the Aryans¹, Asurs, Dravidians and Nagas. This is probably the reason why there is no historical proof of mutual conflicts or wars between Aryans, Dravidians, Asurs and Nagas. There is every chance that these names indicate the same set of people, because the Brahmins have called themselves 'Sur' (Bhudev) and the rest as 'Asur'. In all, there occurred thirteen wars between the Devas and Asurs.

1. e.g. "Oh Indra, you cut into pieces both of those unfriendly ones and the Dasas—the Aryans and the Asurs, in the manner the forests are cut."—Rig Veda, 6/33/1 or the Aryans mentioned separately and after Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Shudras in Yaju Veda, 26/2.

I. Historical Origin of Jharkhand Communities

It appears from the historical context that the early inhabitants of Jharkhand belonged to either of the three communities—*Nishad* (Austrie), Dravidian and Asur. The Mundas, Kharias, Korwas, Korkus, Birhors, Bhumijas, Kherwars, Santals, Ho's, Mal Paharias etc. belong basically to the 'Nishad' group of people. Studies of the Munda-speaking families reveal² that they had immigrated in two different streams from the Central Asia, once before the Christian Era and then again around the 12th century A.D. The Oraon, Nagesia and Sadan communities belong basically to the Dravidian group of people. The Oraons entered Jharkhand from Rohtasgarh, at the time of Sher Shah (16th Century A.D.). The Sadans came to reside over Jharkhand in the first century B.C., when the Satbahans of Andhra had occupied Bihar and made 'their horses drink the water of the Ganges'. The Sadanis are the descendents of Satbahans. However, owing to the disintegration of their social order, the Cheros, Baraiks, Chik-Baraiks, Rautia etc. have become known as different tribes. "Chik" is originally a Dravidian word, meaning 'small'. In the same way the word "Sad" means 'horse'.

According to the Munda tradition, when the Munda came, the Asurs had been the inhabitants of this area. Following Shri Ananta Prasad Shastri, the Ranchi District Gazetter writes that the Nagas were a tribe included in the Asur race from which have originated the names like Nagpur, Chotanagpur etc.³ Since they found that the country was occupied by the Naga people, the Munda too have named this land as 'Nagadesh'.⁴ In the mythology, Jimutbahan had sacrificed his life to save Naga named Shankhachuda from its enemy Garuda and had put an end to the terror created by the latter among the Nagas. The descendants of the Naga people even at present observe 'Jitia' festival to celebrate this success of Jimutbahana. A

2. J. H. Hutton, *Caste in India: Its Nature, Functions and Origins*. Oxford, 1961, No. 4.

3. Anant Prasad Banerjee Shastri, *Asur India* (1926) Cited in *District Gazetter, Ranchi* (1970), pp 41.

4. S. C. Roy, *The Mundas and their Country*, Bombay, 1970, pp. 334.

number of communities who now reside in Jharkhand celebrate Jitia, and are almost certainly the descendants of the ancient Nagas. Further, among the many meanings of the word 'Kurma' one is snake (naga); and that may well be the origin of the name 'Kurmi'. In the same way the meaning of the word 'Ahi' is also snake and the name 'Ahir' has probably been derived from that. The Nagbanshis, Kurmis, Ahirs, Saraks, etc., those who observe 'Jitia', are the communities who have originated from Naga People.

All these communities are found today almost strictly within the confines of the greater Jharkhand*, which itself is an indication of their local origins. There exist a few other communities, e.g. Jhora, Bhuinya, Bhogta, Ghasi, Pan (Swasi) etc. who are found only in the Jharkhand area, and are more probably related with one of the three races discussed above. A number of these communities are known as Scheduled Tribes at present, and are accepted as the original inhabitants of this area. Others e.g. the Sadanis, Nagbanshis, Kurmis or Bauris are included as castes within the Hindu communities and are often confused as to be the immigrants since there is a tendency to consider that all Hindus were immigrants. Under the influence of Brahminism, the feudal families of Jharkhand have tried for long to depict themselves as distinct from the local people. They had invented various stories regarding their origins e.g. (1) Ratu—child reared by a snake, accepted as the king of Mundas and established the Nagbanshi dynasty, (2) Panchkot—child reared by cow, accepted as the king among the Kurmis, (3) Barahabhum—child reared by pig (Baraha), (4) Bonai—child reared by peacock near a Kadamba tree and founder of Kadambanshi dynasty, (5) Patkam—claiming ancestry to Bikramditya, (6) Jashpur—outsider Kharwar Rajput accepted as King by the Kharwars, similarly (7) Gangapur—Keshri Rajput, (8) Surguja—Rakhshel Rajput, (9) Kariya—Chauhan Rajput, and the chiefs of Dhalbhum, Porahat, Saraikela, Kharswan, Bandhgaon, Karaikela, Chainpur etc. all claiming their ancestors were outsiders (Rajdom Kshatriya, Suryabanshi Kshatriya or Chandrabanshi Kshatriya)

* e.g. the area of inclusive of the parts of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa which is included in Jharkhand cultural region.

accepted by the local people as their kings.⁵ But the very fact that none of these families were able to provide any testimony in favour of their outsider origin is the best proof of those being concocted. Yet, their, attempts have gone a long way to confuse the self-identity of Jharkhand.

Some other communities, e.g. Domra, Mahli, Turi, Chamar etc. are not confined to Jharkhand. But they are found all over Jharkhand, and are residing here for long. The fact that all these communities, including the last named ones, are residing in a particular geographic region for a long time, and most of them are found only in this region, is enough to help the development of a culture, specific to Jharkhand area and distinct from other areas. This culture, the 'Jharkhandi culture', is a community culture and is not much influenced by Brahminism.

II. Are the Kurmis Autochthones ?

Available space will not permit such a discussion about all disputable communities found in Jharkhand. Here I will confine the discussion to only one of the most numerous communities found in Jharkhand who are now considered as Hindus and are often considered as outsiders in consequence. In particular, they are considered to be the same Kurmi caste found in Gangetic Bihar and U.P. But the similarity exists only in the group name. The Kurmis of Jharkhand who follow the totamic *gotra* (clan) system similar to the tribal people are surely distinct from the Hindu Kurmis of U.P. and adjacent Bihar. No Kurmi of the Gangetic plains will marry in the families of Jharkhandi Kurmis. The Jharkhandi Kurmis are still in the habit of eating not only chicken and pork but also insects like white ants. The Kurmis of Chotanagpur are called a 'Dhorr' Kurmi. Their women expect to be pregnant by drinking the water that flows over the male organ of the Idol named Irgunath and wear iron bangles on the occasion of marriages. All these indicate their

5. W. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Sengal*, Vol. XVII, London, 1877, pp. 136-139, 175-6, 195-6, 205-217, 221-2, 282-292, of Concept Publishing, Delhi edition.

tribal origins. By an order of the India Government⁶, in 1913, the Kurmis were considered in the same bracket with the Mundas and Santhals. For political reasons, the names of Ghasis, Pans and Kurmis have been dropped later from the official list of Scheduled Tribes.

Even to this date there exists the tribal custom of mockfights in Kurmi marriages. In their marriages the most sacred custom is to put brass bangles which indicates that there existed the system of exogamous marriages by capture among the Kurmis during the bronze age. Following the slaughter of Mahisha-Asur by Goddess Durga, the Asurs were absorbed in her clan. The *gotra* names like ,Gosur, Bakasur, Karwar (Bhainsasur), Gaur etc. among the Kurmis, indicate the influence of Asurs on them.

6. The Gazettes of India
Published by Authority

No 181

Simla
Judicial

Saturday May 3, 1913

The 2nd May 1913

No. 550. Whereas the tribes known as the Munda, Oraons, Santal, Hos, Bhumij, Kherias, Ghasis, Gonds, Khondhas, Korwas, Kurmis, Male Saurias and Pans dwelling in the province of Bihar and Orissa have customary rules of succession and inheritance incompatible with the provisions of the Indian Succession Act, 1865 (X of 1865) and it is expedient to apply the provisions of the Act to the Member of those tribes.

In exercise of the powers conferred by section 332 of the Indian Succession Act 1865 (X of 1865) The Governor General in Council is pleased to exempt all Mundas, Oraons, Santal, Hos, Bhumij, Kharias, Ghasis, Gonds, Khondas, Korwas, Kurmis, Male Saurias and Pans dwelling in the province of Bihar and Orissa from the operation of the provisions of the Act retrospectively from the passing of the Act.

Provided that notification shall not be hold to effect any person in regard the rights a decision contrary to the effect has already been given by a competent civil court".

Certified to be correct copy

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Commissioner's Office

Chotanagpur Division

Date : 16-6-76

Although Kurmis belong to the Asur (Naga) group of people, some amount of intermixing has occurred with the Mundas and Santhals which is evident in such gotra names as Birhor, Hansda, Tete etc. found among the Kurmis too. Some other gotra names like Tiru, Chil etc. indicate the influence of Dravidas on Kurmis. The Bhumijas found in Manbhum are from the same stock as the Mundas as is evident from the fact that intermarriage between these two communities occur freely. However, unlike the Mundas, the Bhumij community resides in the midst of Kurmi settlements. It is notable that although the Kurmis and the Bhumijas differ widely in their social customs and languages, the two groups are socially accepted to each other. Following the Naga custom which exists even to this date, the Bhumijas are accepted as *Sahla* or *Mitta* (befriended) by the Kurmis. Similar relations are found between Kurmis and Santhal. All these social phenomena of inter-community relations need hundreds of years for being effective and bears testimony to the fact that the Kurmis are residing in this regions for several centuries along with the Munda and Santhal tribes.

In fact, it may be of little surprise should the Kurmis happen to inhabit in this area even earlier than the Munda tribes, who are often accepted as the earliest and original inhabitants of this region. Indirect evidences like the travel accounts of Sumaschic, Fabien or Huen Tsang had never referred to any point which might indicate the existence of Munda in this area. According to Sri Sarat Chandra Roy, the first Munda dynasty was established here in 64 A.D.⁷ But the discovery of two silver coins of Vim Kadfisis I (200 B.C.) in the richest Munda settlement in Koel basin, of two gold coins of Vim Kadfists II at Kumharia of Lohardaga and three gold coins of Hubiska at Belwadag near Khunti⁸ indicate that this area was well-settled before the time of the Mundas. None of the important rivers in this area e.g. Sankh, Koel, Damodar (Pushpakaran, Pokarna), Swarnrekha etc. is named in Mundari language. Then who were the settlers here earlier than the Mundas? There are many evidences in favour that these settlers were the

7. S. C. Roy, *op. cit.*, pp. 77.

⁸ District Gazetteer Ranchi, 1970, pp. 39.

Kurmis. According to Dr. G. S. Ghurye, the Kurmis had to emigrate from Central India to the forests of Jharkhand because of the pressure from the Gonds and the Kamars, in a remote past when the Kurmis were still doing "daha" (shifting) cultivation.⁹ Kamars are found settled in all Kurmi villages in Jharkhand. It appears that the Munda immigrants had compelled the Kurmis to move eastwards leaving their original settlements at Kurmgarh on the borders of Ranchi and Surguja districts. At present Kurmis inhabit the area east the richest Munda settlements, but are extinct in Kurmgarh area. Most probably the pressure from Sadans too had forced the Kurmis to move further east. Sadans were settled in western Jharkhand even in first century B. C. and the Satbahans had fought the Kushans which may explain the discovery of Kushan coins in this region. Among the Sadans, there is a clan called Baraik whose martial origin is established. On the whole, by the pressure of these people the Kurmis had to move eastwards and are found at present in Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Dhanbad, Santhal Parganas, Singhbhum, Purulia, Midnapur, Bankura, Sundergarh, Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar districts only. It is notable that their settlements are completely encircled on the west by the Munda settlements. In the historic time, the Kurmis had built up a highly developed civilization and a powerful state in this region. It appears from the available facts that the famous king Shashanka (seventh century A.D.), who had defeated Harshabardhan, was a Naga king and his capital Karnasubarna was located in the Kurmi land of Jharkhand. But its detailed proof is beyond the scope of this paper.¹⁰

III. Cultural Confluence

Habitually, the Jharkhandis are worshippers of nature. Their religious beliefs do not extend much beyond that. The moon, the snake and the water symbolises the process of reproduction.¹¹ All the three are incorporated in Shiva, and

9. G. S. Ghurye, *Aborigines So Called and Their Future*, 1941, pp. 12.

10. for details, see author's note in *Shalpatra*, (Dhanbad, in Hindi), no. 4, February 1978, pp. 37-39.

11. Rambilas Sharma, *Bhasa Aur Samaj* (in Hindi), New Delhi, 1961, pp. 514.

are worshipped in the form of His 'linga' (male reproductive organ). In the world outlook of the Jharkhandis, Shiva is the reason of creation, sustenance and destruction. Jharkhandis never felt the need to know more than these primitive beliefs. The religious waves of Buddhism, Jainism or Hinduism have not been able to move them much from this ground. For example, the Sarak community, which has been highly influenced—in the standard of Jharkhand—by these religions, are so great worshipper of nature that they worship even the plough and discover lives in inanimate objects. Although, by the influence of Jainism they feel shy to listen to the word 'slaughter', nevertheless in certain festivals they sacrifice imitations of animals and thus preserve the traces of their traditional religion. Saraks do not accept any food from the Brahmins just like Oraon¹², Kurmi¹³ or Santhal. In general, the Jharkhandis have preserved their gods and goddesses. Along with Utur, Gahera, Karma, Jitia, Sarna, Bansingh, Gram Devta, such goddlings as Darha, Kudra, etc. are worshipped.

Not that, in all the fields the Jharkhandis have been able to resist the outside influence. Ahir and Kurmi priests were ousted from Baidyanathdham and Basukinath temples; in the Durga temple of Tamar, Brahmin priest has been appointed parallel to the Munda priest. Along with Shaivaite rituals, the Mundas, Santhals and Ho's also practice Vaishnava Kirtans (song). Some of the Bhumij and Munda families have embraced Hinduism.¹⁴ After the Raja of Panchkot embraced Hinduism¹⁵ the martial dance of the Kurmis called 'Chhou dance' was made to accept Hindu mythological anecdotes.¹⁶ The Kurmis were not recognised as Kshatriya by the Maharashtrian Brahmins of

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12. Radhakrishna, "Bhed Bhawhee Galat Hai", *Adivasi*, Hindi Weekly, Ranchi, Govt. of Bihar, Gantantra Diwas Visheshank. 1926, January, 1978, pp. 3.
 13. H. H. Risley, *Tribes, and Castes of Bengal*, 1891, XVI (I) pp. 536 also J. H. Hutton, *Caste in India*, pp. 76.
 14. Roy, *op. cit.*, pp. 80.
 15. S. Abasthi, "Sare Bharat ki kala Me Audh ke Ram" *Dharmyug* (Hindi weekly), Bombay, October 8, 1978, pp. 11.
 16. Alokanda Ghosh, "Nritya ke Samapt Hone Tak Wah Yudh Karta Raha" *Kadambini*, New Delhi (Hindi monthly), May 1974, pp. 129.

Bero and Oriya Acharya of Seraikela ; but they agreed to allow them some more status ("Jal Chal") than earlier.¹⁷ However, even this recognition was an achievement for someone considered so long as 'unclean' in the Hindu caste hierarchy. The process of enchantment among the Kurmis was initiated. In absence of a conscious intelligentsia and in the desire to earn some social status, the Kurmis surrendered all privileges to protection under the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act.¹⁸ Nibaran Chandra Dasgupta of Purulia, a man famous in the Gandhian Movement, helped the culmination of the process. He was doing a peculiar type of reformatory work among the Kurmis, which was called "Tribalism or Kshatriya culture". During the Census of 1931, he did not only suggest the Kurmis to declare themselves as Hindus but also instructed the enumerators to record all of them as Hindus. The Kurmis were thoroughly 'reformed' in the Census. Nibaran Chandra Dasgupta was declared a saint. The area where the office of Adimjati Seva Mandal is located in Ranchi was renamed Nibaranpur. Who knows whether the Kurmis were thus defeated in their stronghold by the unimaginative action of a saint or were deprived by a cunningly conceived political conspiracy against them ?

At the same time it is true that Nibaran Chandra Dasgupta had saved the Kurmis from mass conversion into Christianity. The Christian Missionaries were active among the Kurmis. The first Christian priest of local origin in Chotanagpur, namely Polush Nemo (vill. Ilu Jargo, dt. Purulia) was a Kurmi. The Missionaries had already translated the Bible into Kurmali. But habitually the worshipper of the nature, Kurmis were never much overtaken by any other religion. They have preserved their identity by initiating the 'Gossaiyan Movement' among them.

Brahmin priests are not required in Kurmi rituals like in marriages and deaths. However, recently a trend is being

17. P. P. Mahato, "Ethnicity, Conflict and Integration, The Mahto Case", *Shilalipi* (in Bengali, Bi-monthly), Jamshepur, No. 1, 1979, pp 46.

18. W. C. Lacey, "The Kurmis of Chotanagpur", Appendix V, Part I, Report, Vol. VII, *Bihar and Orissa, Census of India, 1931*, p. 291-4.

observed among the rich Kurmis—who feel ashamed at their Kurmi tribal origins—to invite Brahmin priests in such occasions.¹⁹ Some other communities, who have been influenced more by Hinduism, feel more inclined to engage Brahmins in such rituals. In many cases, the local Pahans (priests) have declared themselves Brahmins to meet such contingencies. Birsa Munda was a disciple of Guru Anandji Pandre, who belonged to the weaver caste. This caste is known by the name of Pan, Pand or Swansi and were considered included in tribes even a few decades ago. However, in the text books read in the schools of Bihar, the Guru of Birsa Munda has been named Anand Pande and described as a Brahmin by caste.²⁰ Probably the original Guru of Ratu Maharaj too was another Pandre. Later, when the king attained some better economic status, he established relations with Maharashtrian Brahmins.

In Jharkhandi marriages the custom is to pay bride-price which, according to Hindu religious texts is an “asuric” custom.²¹ The amount is decided on the consideration of economic conditions of the involved parties. Generally the amount is rupees five, five Sarees (womens’ garment) and one pot of Arisa (sweet cooked bread of rice). Divorce is easy. Women married to others can be accepted as wives, which itself is a remnant of the *Rakshash* culture. Women are allowed to marry the second time, which is called ‘sangha’.

In contrast to the rest of India, where dying persons are laid in contact with the earth, in Jharkhand, death while in contact with the earth is considered unholy. The Jharkhandis burn as well as cremate their corpses. The Sradh (final death ritual) is done on the tenth day. Just as it exists at present among the Kharias, the Kurmi women too used to assemble on the third day after the death to sympathise with the bereaved family. They would take bath and then in a community dinner would

19. V. B. Talwar, “Brahmanbad Aur Jharkhandi Sanskriti”, *Shalpatra* (Hindi monthly), Dhanbad, no. 5, 1978, pp. 10.

20. e. g. “Bihar Baivab”, (in Hindi), textbook for class III (New) Bihar State Text Book Corporation, Govt. of Bihar, pp 80.

21. *Manu Smriti* 3/31.

share a fish. As a result of the reforms among the Kurmis, this ritual is observed among them at present on the tenth day, and the fish is only touched as a token of the traditional custom. On the occasion of the final death ritual the Kurmis wait in the night for the soul to return as an insect.²² This is similar to the Bhuinyas and Gonds of Jharkhand. However, similar custom exists even outside Jharkhand, among the Lhota Nagas of Assam and the Kunbis of Maharashtra.

Such are the outlines of local culture of Jharkhand. Evidently, the Naga, Sadan and the primitive tribal cultures have survived in this land even after two-thousand-years-long influence of Brahminism. The Jharkhandis have survived by far out of the *Varnashram* division of Hinduism. The dynamics over time, the intermixing of different cultures, the characteristic geographic personality of the region and the severe economic backwardness has imparted a distinction to the society and culture in the Jharkhand region which is peculiar to this region alone. This culture should properly be called 'Jharkhandi culture', the people who share this culture constitute the 'Jharkhandi nation'.

IV. Problem of "Ex-Tribals"

The Jharkhandi communities have been converted in varying degrees to Hindus, Muslims and Christians by the influence of these various streams of religions. The degree of their conversion has been judged by the 'experts' and they have been categorised as 'Scheduled Tribe', 'Hindu', 'Muslim' or 'Christian'. Ironically, the tribes who have been converted to Christians, still enjoy the privileges of protective land legislations like the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act. But if they are converted into Hindu or Muslims, they are not entitled to receive such protection. Nor are they considered for the Government jobs reserved for the benefits of underdeveloped communities, the educational facilities and scholarships extended to such communities etc., all reserved for those favoured to be Scheduled Tribes.

How developed are these communities that they need no protection?

22. Hutton, *op. cit.*, pp. 243 and 252.

Appendix—1

Although *Jitiya* is observed outside Jharkhand as *Jiwit-Putrika' Vrata*, it was a naga festival, which has been duly spiritualised by the Brahmins later on; which spread over North India. *Satya Narayan Vrata* is a *Vrata* which has been introduced in the Hindu Society in or after Mohamedan period. The spiritualisation of tribal festivals is still on its way. "Karma" has been spiritualised by the Brahmin as *Parshwa Ekadash*. On their way of spiritualisation, the Brahmins wrote "Allahopnisad" and "Ishopnisad" to bring them into Hindu fold. But neither the Muslim nor the Christian are regarded as Hindu. It is *Jitiya*—which proclaims, that the descendants of Naga people are still in existence; though they might have been intellectual and cultural slave of the Brahmins.

Sadani---A Distinct Language ?

A. K. JHA*

[Santali, Mundari or Kurukh are regarded as distinct languages and the speakers are considered as belonging to distinct races. The Sadani group of languages on the other hand has been characterised as a form of Hindi or Bengali. The people whose mothertongues are any of the Sadani languages are considered in consequence, Biharis or Bengalis who had immigrated in the past. The following article outlines some reasons why Sadani should be considered a language distinct from Aryan languages, a finding which has important bearing on the ethnic question of the Sadani-speaking people. In outlining the distinctness the author has also been able to indicate the closeness of the language to a primitive culture as against the Aryan culture of the Plains.

The article is also part of an effort towards the formation of a link language. Dr. Kesari has mentioned** that this language has the potentiality of becoming the link language of Jharkhand—Editor].

* The author is grateful to a number of pro-Jharkhandi scholars, writers, linguists and persons of letters and specially grateful to Dr. B. P. Kesari.

** "Problems of Prospects of Jharkhandi Languages" in this volume.

Linguists and scholars have in general overlooked the independent existence of the Sadani—the Jharkhandi link language. Scholars like Grierson, Sampatti Aryani or Keshri Kumar Singh have tried directly or indirectly to negate the separate identity of this language. As a result, the most numerous section of the Anaryan Jharkhandi people, whose mother-tongue is Sadani, have been losing their own identities. So much so that even the scholars sympathetic to these people have unconsciously indulged in this plot identifying Sadani as dialects of this or that of the Aryan languages.

In this small article we will discuss in brief a few aspects of the Sadani languages to show (i) the commonness between different dialects of Sadani, (ii) their difference from Sanskrit and languages originating from the Sanskrit and, (iii) the vast capacity of expression in the language. The reader is requested also to notice the ancient root of the language and its connection with a cultural world distinct from the Aryans which too indicate the distinct thought process and cultural milieu of the Sadanis speakers.

Phonetics and Grammar

(i) All the members of the Sadani language family follow almost the same trend of phonology. And so in their original forms the same letters of the 'Nagri' script are avoided.¹

(ii) Feelings of exclamation are expressed in all the members of the language family almost in the same manner of high or low pronunciation etc.²

(iii) Words not ending in 'a' like-sounds are generally aspirated articulation and pronunciation in the beginning, in Nagpuri Kurmali and Khortha as well.³

1. Ri (ऋ), Lri (लृ), Ai (ऐ), Au (औ), Uh (ऋः) N (ण), Sh (ष), Sh (श), X (क्ष), Jn (ज्ञ), Yn (ङ) etc. are used nowhere.

2. ए ! (oh!), बाह-बा (bravo!), ओह ! (alas!) & etc.

3. ईकर/एकर नामे ? (Its name?), ईकरे आव ! (come hither!) etc. Here, "ई", "ना", "आ" are aspirated.

(iv) In all members of this language family, the independent pronoun has a vowel-o-vowel sound, otherwise that of a weak vowel.⁴

(v) All the signs of cases are almost the same in any of these languages and dialects.

e.g. O/K Sign⁵ is commonly used for nominative case.

(vi) In all the members of the Sadani language family gender affects adjectives only when the adjective appears as a noun or shows nearness, affinity, inferiority etc.⁶

(vii) (a) Only plural forms of pronouns differ up to an extent from each other but even there, unity and common uses exist.

(b) Some difference is also found in the forms of the helping verbs but merely of the pronunciation and form, not of the root. And, even this is due to the fact that the Kurmali outnumbers other members of the Sadani family in using suffixes.

Special Usages Common for Sadani Language Family and Identical Derivative Words

(i) 'Ojha'—It is such a word which is used in Aryan languages as (a) a sacred caste title, (b) an address of special respect to a son-in-law,⁷ (c) a person chanting 'mantras' or known as a savior against djinns, snake venom etc. But, in Jharkhand 'Ojha' means simply a cord which is used in weaving a cot.

(ii) 'Kar'—This word is used in four different meanings in Sanskrit, viz.—(i) tax (ii) hand (iii) elephant trunk and (iv) rays of light.

4. ई (this, it), अ (that, he) & etc. ई ऊ are uttered as vowel-o-vowel.

5. i.e. Zero/K (क) sign.

6. "बड़की के कह" (tell the elder woman), माई कहलिक/कहइल (कहल) mother told "टिरा-टिरी चेंग-चुरि आ" (young and tiny children)

7. In the Mithila area.

In Sadani, 'Kar' word is used in five different senses all of which are quite at variance with the Sanskrit meanings viz (i) side, (ii) beside, (iii) slow, (iv) nearness and (v) silent.⁸

(iii) 'Gobra (ek)'—The Sadani does not attribute the same notion of 'cowdung' which is born by the Aryan languages in the use of this word. Rather it bears the sense of weakening, especially pertaining to the meaning of the discharge of stool or excretion. It is noteworthy that the same word denotes both human and animal discharges.

Several synonymous words are also in common use, viz., (i) 'Sahrek', (ii) 'Dhorhek', (iii) 'Chherek', (iv) 'Ladek', (v) 'Bhoribhaskek!' (vi) 'Gigi karek' (vii) 'Pet jharek' etc.

(iv) 'Siraik/Sirack'—This word means in Sadani to finish, to end or to die. This is why there is a rite of keeping 'Siraghar' in Jharkhandi tradition. 'Siraghar' means a house or a room where the performance of showing respect to late ancestors is made. No worship of the Gods of the Aryans is performed nor are there a large number of Gods as among the Aryans.

Like this ritual "Siraghar" can not be found in old Aryan enclaves; no trace of the adorables (natural objects and mystries) like the "Maraiya", the "Ganwrakhwa", the "Kudra-Kudri", the "Talori", the "Bonga", the "Sing bonga", the 'Marang buru'⁹ is found in the vast accumulation of Aryan "Sastras".

(v) 'Hinsa', 'Hunra' or 'Sikar lagek'—"Hinsa-hunrasikar lagel hei"—ordinarily it means that meat is being distributed. But a deep probe into the matter leads us to a very ancient age of primitive humans when 'Hinsa' (share) meant a 'share of' and the meat of animals killed by hunter—'Sikar' (meat), was distributed after hunting.

Perhaps due to this very reason even up to the present, just before a feast, "bije kara" (have victory or share of the victory)

8. As 'Kare-Kare Kar Kaitke eker aw, ar/aur karhin bais' (i.e. come hither slowly by this side and sit close and quiet).

9. 'Marang buru' means a big hill/mountains. (And, as the mountains were of much more use in older days this word also means 'big master'). It can be referred here that a mountain of iron ores, in Jharkhand is also called 'Kiriburu' or money mountain.

is held. This means that, a custom persists to date which originated in the habit of hunters, who after hunting and killing an animal used to call others (who had not partaken in the hunt) to share the meat.

Stock of Natural Sounds in Sadani

Such words are abundant in the Sadani language. Their very close connection with natural sounds, indicate that they probably originated in the very-very remote past: at the primitive stage of human development.

The vast stock of original words relate to fire-water (or rains), wind-birds-animals-trees-bushes-shrubs-flowers-fruits-insects-'chhatis' or 'Kunkhri'¹⁰, eating-easing-beating-killing and fighting and also to various other physical activities etc.¹¹ There are also types of multiple uses and multiple forms of words whose usages is almost as if they were aspiring to be counted by the rules of permutation and combination.

e.g. 'Karkara, Kharkhara.....harhara'
'Karkari.....harhari'
'Kurkura.....burbura' and so on.¹²

It is easy to understand what a large lexicon the Sadani language possesses!

(b) The Sadani language has an immense flexibility in expression, which expands with changes of numbers, person, relation etc., in every form of any tense, e.g. The past indefinite tense has altogether five forms in the present form of the English language and six forms (sometimes 6×2) in Hindi of a similar part (say 'Samanya bhootkal'). But the Sadani language has altogether 26 forms.¹³

10. Mushroom

11. The author has made a collection of all such words (unpublished).

12. The sound of oil, 'ghee' etc. being heated is 'Karkara (ek)', verb form whereas, the voice of tiny creatures in verb form is 'Kurkura'. The words, ending with 'i' are nouns and so on.

13. e.g. verb 'gachhek' (to accept) 'gachhal (k)' "gachhla" 'gachhlath' (lain)', 'gachhlaon', 'gachhlo', 'gachbalthu (n)', 'gachhlen', 'gachhai', 'gachhlahan', 'gachhli', 'gachhlio', 'gachhliau', 'gachhliai', 'gachhlik', 'gachhli' (k) 'gachhai' etc. 26 forms of Samanya bhootkal' in the Sadani language.

The Sadani language has also the facility and advantage of interchange and exchange in between different parts of speech which adds amply to its broadness and scope.

Proverbs, Legends, Idioms and Phrases which also depict (i) the contradiction with and the supremacy of the Jharkhandi culture over the Brahministic Aryan culture & (ii) the glorious trend of humanitarian behaviour and egalitarian dealings with women as found in Jharkhand.

(i) 'Kol-kurmi-kara, Ved-saster-Chhara!'—In this proverb, the 'Kol-Kurmi' etc. aboriginal Anaryan races have been told to be beyond Aryanity.

(ii) 'Je kare puin, takar dhipa suin!—Here the 'Brahministic puin' (worship) has been termed as destructive, because all the Aryan preachers of 'puin' were (and also are) against Anaryans.

(iii) 'Nam gah-gah, pecha raja' & 'Raja bap, na dare bap!'—These proverbs are evidently opposed to monarchy and present a satirical use.

(iv) 'Sada Karal Sadhaur', to 'bhainsur' rahla ogra!—This proverb indicates, how a sister-in-law, is disturbed by an elder brother-in-law from eating something palatable of her choice (but the brother-in-law is opposed if she does so);

(v) 'Randh main jaldi bhat, nain to munr for tau bap'—A conscious Jharkhandi son defending his mother if she is overburdened or oppressed by the father.

(vi) 'Le mei/nuni pitha khan, sasur ghare ke detan!, & 'Dona-patrijhar, le beti mun mar'—i.e. if in any case (say, by Aryan influence etc. where the women can eat only when every male member has been well fed)—there seems any sign or possibility of suppression or deprivation etc. by the in-laws etc., then any reasonable father, father-in-law etc. opposes and defends her right.

(vii) 'Tin Kanian men Kaira biha' & '(saitinek) loha pindhak'—These sayings indicate the socially imposed bindings on males willing to marry many times (as against the convention that goes on among the Aryans in the name of 'dharmraksha' etc).

Legends, and proverbs (such as the above) evidently directed against slavery, luxury and other inhuman activities are found

in widespread use, which it is not possible to acquaint the reader with, fully, in this essay. (a) "Sabarnakhe Sonakrekha", (b) "Done-done mar parse, hile konek sona", (c) "Jhare-pate, taka fate", (d) "Dhain re mahtwainek jiu, ek. Ser nune du ser ghiu" etc. These sayings say of natural riches, other prestigious properties and the importance of Jharkhand.

Struggles Against Bureaucratic Capitalism

ARUN SINHA

Our system has propagated a myth that nationalisation brings an end to financial plunder and excesses on workers. The public sector is set apart from the private sector; its main concerns are stated to be 'national development' and peoples' welfare. While this myth has been exploded by a flood of material evidence on the public sector only complementing the private sector, little is known about how the bureaucrats who run the government undertakings freely drain out its resources and criminally treat the workers and people. This is clearly borne out by the conditions found in the two case studies described here in Dhanbad coalfields and in an irrigation project in Singhbhum.

I

The degree and dimensions of exploitation and oppression and monetary drain have evidently changed for the worse after the government take-over of the coalmines in early 1970s. Under the private capital the coalminers had to extract maximum of mineral under conditions of minimum time, safety and subsistence wages. After the state monopoly capital took over,

the same things happened in a sophisticated way: the workers' wages were linked to their daily output; The 'safety week' concept grew up as 'safety-cum-production week'; major human tragedies occurred more frequently; the coal's graduation from private ownership to state ownership brought not even footwears and lamps to all the workers; if the private owners relied on their private armies to tie down the miners the bureaucrats unashamedly used the crowns of the underworld to break the strikes.

The bureaucrats wedded themselves to the policy of 'target-oriented production'. Annual, quarterly, monthly, weekly, daily targets were fixed; this became the colliery managers' sole concern. Indian capitalism urgently needed coal for its growth and so the slogan would become 'maximisation of production'. Under this garb the bureaucracy would expand its non-productive ranks and seek to eliminate the productive forces by mechanisation and other ways. The worker, the most basic determinant in the production process, was, as in the past, passed off as an unreacting milch cow.

Area Number Six: It is not a very conspicuous zone, inhabited as elsewhere by the black diamond and black skins, the pickaxes and pairs of hands, the ever-magnifying pits and the claustrophobic hovels. People of the Abyss? Not the best tricks make their mouths open. They don't have time, and the strength, to do so. Indus Valley Civilisation! Hindu Culture!! British-gifted democratic liberalism!!! If you implore too long may be their lips shall quiver. But a flash it is merely: Hope, they know is very close-fisted. The flash of hope—the hope that tortures might end by telling you things the world still does not know—perishes in a lighting—a lightning that raises the curtain off the stage, that shows a person lying on the floor, in a pool of blood, and a woman and half a dozen children tearing up the roof with screams.

"There is no trouble here. No, nothing at all", the black-skins, the pairs of hands, the pickaxes, the thatch hovels chant in a chorus. The whiteskins lead this symphony. No trouble here. There used to be—once upon a time; before 1970s when those cannibals of the private owners happened to be having sway

over the coalfields. They had no regard for human beings, you know; in their days the blood cells of the workers were legal tender. After the take-over there was a Revolution. No arm-twisting, no wage swallows; security of service and life and bans on money-lending, vice-dens and patronised unions. For the workers it's the golden age—mind you, this is the fact, not a dope to the press.

The Press does not need a fresh dope. Never should any evidence be found against the men like King of Area Number Six; but all the Articles of the Constitution and all the sections of the penal code be referred to in case of workers and peasants. They make the defenceless indefensible and the victims super-victims.

The King of Area Number Six, Hq. Kustaur, therefore, remains [supreme all around and inaccessible to the cursed claws of Mother Justice. His muscles flex with an over-feed of other people's blood of the dead men's and of those luckily alive in his domain. But don't blame him. The monarch rose from a pauper; he came, as hundreds and thousands did, from the 'Bhojpuri region' in search of job, any job, in the coalfields. A tough-grained wrestling amateur Rajput that he was, a coal company took him as a security guard. He exhibited his mettle and prowess on critical occasions, at one time, as the folklore goes, successfully repulsing the 'rush' of a 'violent trade union' into some colliery. His feats endeared him to the Indian National Trade Union Congress and its chieftain in Dhanbad B.P. Sinha. He was given the status of a lieutenant in the INTUC militia. In course of time the unlettered Rajput of farmer origin switched over from lathi to the gun developing into a remarkable and ruthless sharpshooter.

One day the history got its turning point. Another folklore Surajdeo Singh had come into his own: It is I who do everything to keep B.P. Sinha at the top; I know all the games and the tricks that the godfather plays to remain the Godfather in the Dhanbad coalfield. As later developments were to prove beyond doubt this Rajput ex-sentry entertained a burning desire to end his eclipse and become the godfather himself. And this he actually did, with the ease and facility that our system

provides to such epitomes of will and ambition and marksmanship. Sinha was liquidated, his loyal lieutenants were cut to size; more were slain in course of time: Surajdeo Singh became a prosperous transport contractor of the Bharat Coking Coal Ltd., a Government of India Undertaking. He became in June 1977 an honourable member of the Bihar Vidhan Sabha, got re-elected in 1980 and grew as a rallying figure in the world of Rajput politics.

Area Number Six, seven and so on: The King went on an expansion spree. Just as hundreds and thousands from the plains of Bihar and U.P. had done before, and went on doing the sacred restraining laws notwithstanding. He got for himself a dozen sources of income: Transport contracts from the BCCL, levy from other transport agencies to operate in the area, transport contracts from private coal agencies in other states, coal trade, civil contracts, illegal coalmines, movie houses, money-lending, illegal octroi, bottlegging and extortions from the workers. And he faced 60 criminal charges, including 17 murders, dating from 1971.¹

Mafia and the Trade Union

The mafia in the coalfield set its foot long long ago. The seeds were sown by the private mineowners, mainly Indian, before and after Independence. Poor villagers were massively indentured and rammed into ghettos under lock and key. It was barbarity exemplified: they were ordered to extract coal at any cost. A pair of hands was to use the pickaxe, a pair of shoulders was to carry the mineral. A pair of feet was bound by chains. If limbs would do other function there were blood-letters to oversee that they no longer functioned. Those were the best time of the primitive capitalism.

At the time the traditional trade unionism was coming into its own with all its debased character. The mineowners were able to locate dependable allies in the trade unions. A trade union 'leader' was far better a companion than a plain criminal

1. 'Coalfields' Gang war's Political Undertones', *Indian Express*, February 25, 1979.

because of the irrefutable camouflage that he was able to provide. If the 'leader' was his own man the mineowner need not bother about any technical lapses in the enforcement of labour rules; he could leave it to him to keep the labourers in check. So as the leader's popularity remained intact the owners could even agree to have a strike and give the workers a nominal benefit of sorts.

The alliance that existed between the private mineowners and the TU leaders before the nationalisation has been only substituted by the consortium of bureaucrats and TU leaders. It is not without significance that the BCCL bureaucrats have found the leaders like the King of Area Number Six very likeable and indispensable. The Officers' Associations of BCCL, which often blame 'bad law and order' as the cause of failing output, have in all their resolutions and orations never denounced the mafia figures who masquerade as TU leaders.

Why should they? The spurious unions and contractor gangs are not anti-management. They do not take up the grievances of the workers. They siphon away BCCL funds through fake and inflated bills but the commission of the officers is duly paid. These unions do not organise or participate in strikes; on the other hand, when the workers go on strike they try to ensure that 'normal work' goes on in the collieries under their terrorist control. A former chairman-cum-managing director narrated how he himself once rang up the King of Area Number Six to break the strike of craft unions in certain collieries. The king arrived at the collieries and collected the labourers with an announcement that he, as a union leader, would speak to them. When all had come he made an appeal to end the strike. "I would like to have yes or no", he said. When the strikers refused he and his gangsters grabbed their leader and smashed his limbs. "If you still persist everyone will get a like treatment", the king warned and coolly left the place in his car. After reaching home the first thing he did was to pick up the phone: "Is it CMD? Good. The job is done. Any other service, sir?"²

2. Interview with the author.

And rewards are many. Even after the take-over the private business has not folded up in the coalfields. The BCCL, a public sector company, has given sufficient scope for private operations: the coal trade, the transportation of sand for stowing in the collieries and the coal from the collieries to the railway loading points and coal *bhattas*. Practically all operations except extraction of the mineral are privatised. From time to time questions have been raised over the private element in the public sector and the hackneyed answer has suggested its departmental substitution. At one time an attempt was made to eliminate the transport contractors—who officially got annual assignments worth Rs. 5 to 6 crores and unofficially Rs. 20 crores from the BCCL—and some dumpers were bought by the company. The move received a resistance from the contractor-bureaucrat consortium and was dropped.

There is no trade union at Kustaur. Janata Mazdoor Sangh, a mafia front, has total control. The workers are forced to pay an annual 'union subscription' and a monthly contribution. These are small sums compared to the funds that they are very frequently called upon to raise out of their wage for the contingencies of the leaders. They are asked to give money in the name of insurance, lottery, etc. If a worker fails to pay, anything can happen to him. "Lakhan Pandit could not pay the union *chanda*. He was barred from duty for 5 days."³ While the mafia punished the erring workers by disallowing them work at the colliery many of its men had their names in the employees register to draw full wages every month without doing an iota of work. "Bachcha Singh (a brother of the mafia king) is on the payrolls of Shimla-Bahal colliery and is being shown as a bonus clerk on the employees register. He hardly comes to the office

3. 'Mafia stranglehold on colliery workers', *Indian Express* February 27, 1979.

The coalminers, it is not widely known, get piece rate wages. If someone does not report for duty on any day or produces less than one tonne in manually-operated mines and two tonnes in mines where blasting has been introduced has to lose his wages fully or partly. The mafia controlled the duty position. It was a common punishment to deprive a worker of his wages by not allowing him to go to his work for a certain number of days.

but he is getting his salary. This is within the knowledge of the management and they can hardly justify his employment.”⁴

The mafia was found to have a four-tier structure: the politicians, the musketeers, levy collectors and agents among colliery employees, each having a separate duty. Flourishing with what the mafia's independent marxist enemy A.K. Roy calls “black economic power” (the earnings from BCCL transport contracts alone are estimated officially at one crore rupees annually) it has total command over eight collieries of the Area. At Shimla-Bahal colliery the author, who moved anonymous, was shown a barrack where the mafia used to hold its court-kutchery as the workers and the mafia called it. Some workers confided that when an enemy was picked for award of a sentence—for in any way obstructing the mafia operations—the king would sit in the one-man jury's chair and hear his informers. He would pronounce a punishment proportionate to the enemy's ‘crime’ and position; if he was a small threat, he needed a remedial assault; if he was a bigger danger, he had to be made handicapped. When the judge thought the man was an unavoidable peril and known to be obstinate, he would award him death sentence. The judge and his associates would then plan a strategy detailing where and when he was to be shot and who would be the musketeers and what type of guns and vehicles would be used and how much the policemen concerned paid. The guns were then entrusted to the chosen killers and then a cool judge would drive off, the workers dispersed.

This is then the world that the coalfield workers live in. A world, that is run by the blood-suckers and the cannibals; a world that shows no sign of freeing itself from the armed and allied gangs of contractors, bureaucrats, union leaders, extortioners and moneylenders and parasites. This world has little altered after the so-called nationalisation: Their feet are still chained to extract coal in primitive conditions, without the safety lamps, exhaust fans, self-rescuers and methanometers⁵ and

4. Report to the Deputy Commissioner, Dhanbad, from the Magistrate posted at Kustaur early 1979, *Ibid*.

5. ‘Coal: Higher Production at What Cost?’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 23, 1976.

‘Coal Continuing Violation of Safety Rules: *EPW*, October 30, 1976.

‘Coal: Still Close-fisted on Welfare’, *EPW* November 6, 1976.

any sympathy from the civilised universe. About 60 per cent of them are not physically capable of doing the "hazardous and back-breaking job" in the coalmines.⁶ And under these conditions, the concept of 'safety weeks' has been changed into 'safety-cum-production weeks': the only concern is how many tonnes come out every day.

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6. *Times of India*, April 12, 1980. The newspaper's report was based on an interview with Dr. P. K. Dutta, president of the Public Sector Committee of the Indian Medical Association. He further said: Even after eight years of nationalisation no attempt has been made to assess the incidence of occupational and chest diseases among the coalminers. Pneumoconiosis is a pernicious occupational health problem in mining industry caused by the exposure of miners to fine dust.

This is an incurable lung disease. Elaborate studies in advanced countries have led to the conclusion that by controlling the dust exposure the incidence of the disease can be controlled. For this purpose they have set a safe standard of dust for working in the mines. In the UK coalmines this standard is being observed and it is expected that there will be very few cases of pneumoconiosis. Studies made by the Central Mining Research Stations show that average dust exposure of miners in Indian mines exceeds the approved limits. A random survey made by the CMRS reveals that in Indian mines about eight per cent of the miners suffer from this deadly disease. There are other diseases too from which the miners suffer—filaria, hookworms, abdominal disease, chest and respiratory ailments like bronchial asthma. Preventive and prophylactic action against diseases to which miners are prone is woefully inadequate in Indian mines. There are only three central hospitals and a few regional hospitals under the Coalmines Welfare Organisation besides some central hospitals in the collieries and a few dispensaries. The hospitals to a limited extent, take care of the medical side of the miners' health. The hygienic, sanitary and other aspects of health care, which go a long way to immunise the miners are ignored. Even when occupational diseases are detected, a miner seldom gets proper treatment. He has apprehension that he may lose his job on grounds of ill-health. A miner suffering from these deadly diseases goes on with the incubus as long as he lives. The heat in the mine is another cause of disease. The environmental heat stress in Indian coalmines, as assessed by the CMRS, shows that this is "quite adverse". The 'dry bulb' and 'wet bulb' temperatures are practically the same, both being 90 degrees in many instances. Such highly humid condition is a great handicap for any manual work.

Public Money for Private Gains

Private capital did not fold up after the take-over. The bureaucrats gave it a respectable place, deciding that barring the coal extraction practically all the operations at the collieries would be assigned to the private capital represented by the contractors. The bureaucrats emerged on the scene as only the private owners-in-mufti, allotting contract licences to favourites and gangsters and sharing the booty. The uniform and uncontrolled flow of finance under the government ownership produced a new class of contractors in the Dhanbad coal-fields. This development took place in other colliery areas as also at public sector undertakings like HSCL (Hindustan Steel Works Construction Ltd). At Bokaro where the construction work was contracted to the HSCL, a horde of 'sub-contractors' gathered to rob the public exchequer. They paid arbitrary wages to their workers: in fact, some of them disappeared from Bokaro after completing their contract without paying any wages to the workers.

It is the licence that the bureaucrat-contractor leagues enjoy that is believed to usher in violence not only in Dhanbad coal-fields but also under the public sector companies like HSCL. At Bokaro under HSCL the contracts are handed out to the sub-contractors, who in turn reward the management with the suppression of the workers exactly in the same manner as the contractors do it for the private firms. At Jamshedpur the contractors are drawn from the goonda cliques that the Tatas have reared over the years to silence the workers. A big Tata contractor only recently hurled some adivasi workers into a river.⁷

The contract gives rise to violence in Dhanbad that nobody seems powerful enough to curb; the BCCL is not interested in checking it. A recent report said:

It is alleged that either out of fear or for money the BCCL managers in the collieries and Areas have been favouring the mafia plunders all these years. Even the BCCL chairman-cum-managing director R. G. Mahendru

7. 'Slag-pickers meet watery graves', *Times of India*, August 27, 1978.

admits this: in certain Areas the manager had to develop a 'working relationship' with these people for they too have wives and children. But nobody in the BCCL has any logical answer to the question of why this public sector enterprise has never thought of a scheme by which the contract system may be eliminated. Is it credible that a public sector enterprise, which has been spending hundreds of crores of rupees every year, would find it difficult to invest a meagre sum of rupees 20 crores on transport activities? Once the transport vehicles are bought the indirect savings would be considerable. At present BCCL does only 10 per cent of its transport work on a departmental basis. The undertaking has a plan to buy equipment worth Rs. 2 crores. But there are approximately 100 collieries under BCCL and at the present rate the contract system cannot be eliminated before 1991.⁸

An 'analytical study' conducted by the Police Research and Development Bureau in 1979 only officially substantiated what was common knowledge; it said the transport contracts from the BCCL had created many gangs which operated through terror and violence and were in league with BCCL officers. The study was carried out in the wake of a series of murders in Dhanbad, which originated almost invariably from the competition that the various gangs did among each other to have the largest share of plunder. To beat down such exposures in the media the BCCL tried a cover-up; it made an announcement that the transport contractors would be replaced by its own fleet of vehicles. It would be naive to believe this. Even if it is granted that the BCCL, just for a show, replaces them, its bureaucrats would open up other holes for the contractors to dip into the company treasury.

Mafia's Power Built up

The power of the contractor gangs was exposed to public gaze in course of the second crackdown since nationalisation on the mafia early 1979. Within a year preceding that, 25 people had been killed in gang wars. The financial stakes were high

8. 'Coalfields Gang War's Political Underones', *op. cit.*

enough to make the gangs act with ruthlessness. A young deputy commissioner, who initiated the crackdown, very soon found that he had burnt his fingers.

He prepared a list of 100 mafia men for prosecution and arrested the King of Area Number Six, then an MLA of Janata Party. A crisis that crippled the administrative move was the complete darkness about the records of the mafia figures. The administrators in the past were known to be on their payrolls: a particular police superintendent had, after a few months of his posting, in Dhanbad, endeared himself to them so much that he was given a set of dumpers as a gift and with that he launched himself as a *benami* transport contractor. Wasn't it natural that what the common people know the administration had no 'knowledge' about? To these groups the previous officials gave licences of guns, which only sanctified their arsenals already packed with the most sophisticated weapons acquired from the channels of the underworld, national and international.

"Half the Bihar cabinet seems to be angry over the crackdown," an officer had then said. The Rajput ministers and MLAs of the Janata Party raised a private furore within their organisation and the officialdom: they threatened the chief secretary and inspector-general of police, who were supposedly blessing the Dhanbad administration's move, and they warned the then chief minister Karpoori Thakur that the Rajput and other high caste members would vote him out in the coming trial of strength within the Janata legislature party. A Rajput minister, formerly socialist, went down to Dhanbad jail to meet Surajdeo Singh. Even the Janata party president Chandra Shekhar, it was said, sent a word to the Chief Minister to get the mafia king released. Chandra Shekhar, who came from the king's native district Ballia, was known to have favoured him in allotting the ticket for Assembly elections. The king had endeared himself to the former Young Turk leader of Congress party by virtue of his caste, native association and tremendous financing capacity.

Meanwhile the legal and technical avenues, of which there are always a plenty for the ruling classes, were explored. The king's money and caste had already drawn into his camp a

number of lawyers and intellectuals in Dhanbad; they had organised a continuous sit-in before the collectorate for several days for his release ; they had published pamphlets and called the press. The king had been then detained for six months under the new Control of Crime Ordinance : perhaps the only known big case in which this ordinance was not used against the genuine mass leaders in the state. The move set in motion was to introduce an amendment in the ordinance for the exemption of members of state legislature from its purview. "The chief minister is using the ordinance to harass his political enemies," the king's men in the ministry, party and coalfield's elite circles argued.

When this attempt proved abortive they planned a second move. The deputy commissioner and other officials had laboured hard meanwhile to open up the criminal cases long pending against Singh and his men. But suddenly in the jail he fell 'ill'; the prison doctor gave him a certificate on bribe that he had developed a chest trouble and could not be able to appear at the court. The mafia was buying time. The deputy commissioner suspected the game and he ordered that Singh be examined through an x-ray at private clinic. No sooner than the order transpired that the mafia sent round a word to all the x-ray clinics in Dhanbad town. A single word was enough : the deputy commissioner was stunned to find no clinic ready to x-ray the chest of the King. Some said, "our machine is out of order since a month" and others closed down their shops for days together.

Dhanbad's crown of the underworld never appeared at the courts. And while still 'ill' with a chest trouble he applied for a bail to the Ranchi circuit of Patna High Court and unzipped his purse before the two allegedly corruptible judges to secure a triumphant release. Out of jail he was drowned in garlands and taken out in a victory procession. In Area Number Six there was a hurricane of chilling horror.

The workers had been proved perfectly correct; they had never believed that the mafia king could be contained by any force in this world. When the crackdown began and the arrests were made and the terrorists went into hiding, anonymous

letters from Area Number Six flooded the Deputy Commissioner's office. "We cannot describe how ecstatic we are at his arrest. But for the moment we keep it to our heart," one of them said. Many workers wrote in plain words that they could not depend for their 'liberties' on someone like a deputy commissioner who could be pulled off like a puppet the next moment. They had seen how, even in early 1975, there was such an action which led to the preemptory transfer of the then deputy commissioner. At that time it was the Congress ministers who had intervened and now it was the Janata ministers who were raising a hell. "For us there is no hearing in this world," a letter said. At least one worker from Kustaur, the headquarters of Area Number Six, summoned enough courage to turn up in person before the deputy commissioner to "tell everything" about the operations and oppression of the mafia. "But when I asked his name his face turned white and he started trembling and finally broke down and could hardly speak," the deputy commissioner said.⁹

Growth of consciousness and militant organisation among the workers has been able to check to some extent the absolutism of such leagues that are reinforced by the policemen. But their terrorist reign continues in many areas, with the coal bureaucracy fully patronising them at all levels. At local colliery levels it is actually the mafia that runs the management; it decides who are to be employed, who are to be laid off, who to be kept off work for how many days and who are to be awarded the various contracts. At the top management level the policies relevant to the mafia groups are framed according to their needs and wishes. The reversion of the decision of departmental substitution of transport contracts clearly showed this. The brotherhood between the bureaucrats and the mafia contractors has developed on the basis of sharing of the booty in the award and fake or genuine execution of the contracts that annually run into several crores.

The contractor mafia, that uses the trade union camouflage to best serve its own and the bureaucrats' interests, is found to

9. 'Mafia Stranglehold on Colliery Workers', *op cit*.

draw its men from the upper caste migrants from the 'Bhojpuri region'—comprising contiguous parts of north-south Bihar and east UP. Its organisation is based upon casteism and kinship. This, in turn, makes it suitable for use by the top manipulators in politics at state and central levels. The mafia-politician relationship stands on the pillars of casteism, armed support and finance.

A manager in one of the collieries of Area Number Six, while admitting that he was 'too afraid' not to help the mafia, pointed out that one of the factors which sustained the gang was its social organisation. According to him a large section of the employees were Rajputs from Ballia district of UP, the king's native area. In one colliery the king had at the time of government take-over got employment for almost all the young persons of his village and nearby villages. Since Rajputs stood out as the largest single group among the workers they were able to easily dominate the others who belonged to various caste and various districts.

Workers' Movement

The example of the king of Area Number Six blows up the myth about workers' welfare goal of the Public Sector management. Certainly, there has been change in conditions after the nationalisation of coal mines. But that has been only the worse. The encouragement given to the underworld by the private colliery owners has not only been preserved by bureaucrats of the Public Sector, it has been elevated to the unparalleled heights as that of the king of Area Number Six. The multifold increase in hooliganism is purely a contribution of the take over by State capitalism. Under the private ownership, hooliganism was a low paid 'skilled job' in coal mines. State take over has enabled the goondas to plunder the public exchequer, share the booty worth crores of Rupees with the bureaucrats and roll in Public money. The organisation and operation of hooliganism in Dhanbad has responded well to the thousandfold increase in financial stakes. Thanks to the Public Sector, the goondas are now equipped with most modern weapons and exhibit high skills in organising murder spree. Their tremendous pull today can reduce the deputy commissioner, the highest administrator

of the district, to impotence; force amendments in the laws; threaten the chief minister with outvoting by a large section of party MLAs and buy up a section of the judiciary.

This hazards have been so great that in their political behaviour the coalminers are guided more by the question of safety (*suraksha*) than by the economic benefits (*Suvida*). The question of safety does not relate to the working conditions within the mines alone. Safety from the hooligans probably makes up the major area. The hooligans are blessed by the policy makers at the national level—for they are believed to be lending active support to the developmental goal of the national government by containing industrial unrest; The plunder of the public money by the mafia-bureaucratic consortium is overlooked. It is only in the context that the role of much-condemned Bihar Colliery Kamgar Union led by A. K. Roy can be understood. The BCKU has never fought on economic demands, though occasional association with the wage-bike stirs would become unavoidable. Its single-point manifesto since its birth has been elimination of terrorism from the coal-field.

Encircled by beasts, the coalminers had to look out for some organisation, some messiah to give a minimal protection to them and their wives and their children. As a recent election survey showed the voting pattern in the coalmines was largely union-based. The workers voted according to the trade unions or the leaders who gave them protection in their small-world.

Thudu Manjhi, a miner of Beda, says he voted once (1971) at the instance of Gopi Babu, the mineowner. But after nationalisation, he says, he has voted according to Roy's union. What has Roy Babu done for him? Thudu says, 'Before Roy Babu formed his union here, the goondas, mahajans and officers tortured us. We then chased the goondas and mahajans. Now we are free.'¹⁰ The workers' movement in Dhanbad is not only characterised by the intensive operation of the mafia-bureaucrat syndicate, but is also enriched by charismatic trade union leaders like A.K. Roy. A highly qualified engineer turned trade unionist

10. 'Safety Only Issue for Dhanbad Coal Worker', *Indian Express*, December 31, 1979.

A. K. Roy makes a complete contrast to the mafia king by his phenomenal honesty and simplicity. 'Roy Babu never tells a lie'. He wears the cheapest dress, sleeps on a mattress laid on the ground, and stoutly marches several kilometres on the rough ground along with workers with a pair of tyre-cut chappals covering his feet. In a fight Roy Babu is always at the front. In times of distress he is always at the side of the workers. He speaks politely, has infinite patience and can give very valuable advice to the wretched of Dhanbad. He is very different from the usual leftist trade union leaders of the organised working class. His predecessor Sadhan Gupta too had a similar image. Probably the conditions in coal mines of Dhanbad demand such qualities from a trade union leader to survive and be effective in the land of wilderness.

But charisma alone has not enabled A. K. Roy and this phenomenon survive against the tremendous odds. Under his leadership the BCKU has developed a strategy effective under the conditions in Dhanbad. Struggles on economic demands are rare. The BCKU has labouriously made the workers conscious of their human and political rights. It has prevented the workers from being dumb followers of the trade union organisation—in matters of trade union works the BCKU never participates unless the initiative comes from the workers themselves. The task involves resort to anything but the so-called non-violent means. The members are required to keep bows and arrows. Militant mass of workers has been thus able to liquidate the local terrorist regimes in a limited scope. It has taught the workers where to find their allies in their struggles against the bureaucrat-mafia-contractor-police alliance.

This is the peculiarity of Dhanbad working class movements. Unlike the organised working class in many other areas, those at Dhanbad cannot remain indifferent to other sections of the toiling masses and their struggles. The charismatic trade union leaders like A. K. Roy have caught all the poor people's imagination in that area—the peasants and agricultural labourers, the adivasis and harijans, approach the BCKU workers with their own problems. But that alone would not have ensured the extent of support extended by the working class of Dhanbad to the other poor classes; through their

struggles against the mafia-bureaucrat consortium, the working class itself has learnt the importance of having alliances with other classes.

II

There was a huge rally at Chandil, a block in Singhbhum district, on March 26, 1978. The rally, organised by the Forward Block, was in protest against the Subarnrekha river multipurpose project which threatens to displace 75,000 people of about 90 villages in Chandil, Nimdih and Ichagarh blocks. The one lakh-strong rally proceeded four kms. from Chandil to Ghadalengi, the dam site and ended in a public meeting where a decision was taken amid angry and thundering slogans to launch a mass fast-unto-death programme from April 23 for fulfilment of a seven-point charter of demands.

The opposition to the "development policies" has begun at Chandil; at other places it started earlier and continued at more sites in the following years. The area could however boast of a strong mobilisation by Forward Bloc, which has been fighting for the local people since the forest movement of '40s. The party leadership is in the hands of local and national figures who know, feel and react about the problems of the masses there.

Presently, on a wider scale, the peasants and worker in Chotanagpur and Santal Parganas are challenging the basic concepts and patterns of government plans and policies. For some years the government, despite sizeable financial allocations, has not been able to push any of its projects of irrigation, mineral development and afforestation because the people are questioning their relevance to their economy. The state has come down heavily upon them. In two years alone, 1978 and 1979, the people have seen at least 20 of them die in police firing at project sites but they are continuing their resistance undeterred. At some dam sites the work is in progress with armed forces in station.

"Development of irrigation has been very slow in the tribal sub-plan area. Only two per cent cultivable area has been made covered with assured irrigation. Efforts are being to remove the regional imbalance by taking up new major

and medium irrigation schemes benefitting the tribal and drought prone areas. But it has not been possible to make much headway for want of people's cooperation. The local people give tough resistance to, the land acquisition programme meant for taking up irrigation schemes and sometimes resort to violent means. This results in slowing down of the construction scheme and sometimes total stoppage of the construction work, thereby surrendering or diverting a huge amount for tribal area to other areas every year."

This quote is from the Bihar irrigation department's draft annual plan 1980-81, which later also refers specifically to the projects to point out that "the work schedule for the Chirgan, Jaipur and Kans reservoir schemes in Ranchi district, the Latrit, Largara, Jharjbara and Murahir reservoir schemes in Singbhum district and the Jorai and Sugathan reservoir schemes in Santal Parganas have been affected due to public objections. The people have even refused to accept the amount of compensation for the land acquired for the Paras reservoir scheme in Ranchi district. Efforts are being made to settle the issue with the help of local leaders and district authorities."

Just what kind of efforts were being made was self-explanatory at Chandil. The struggle there had begun as long ago as 1970, when the survey work on the Subarnrekha project had started. Partly due to bureaucratic sloth but also because of popular resistance, work on the project proceeded slowly. A few employees would now and then come and do some land measurement but not much actual work was done till the end of 1974 when both the number of measuring staff and the frequency of their visits began to increase. Correspondingly, people's mobilisation too grew in strength, and on March 27, 1975, the kisans besieged the Chandil block office demanding that the Subarnrekha project be altogether dropped.

When Emergency was clamped the Forward Block activists went into hiding and the struggle committee was too scared to function. Construction work then proceeded in full swing; heavy machines were brought, more officials came to the camp and acquisition of land and clearing of forests went apace. The Janata Party's coming to power made little difference to

the project. The kisans were issued with notices to vacate; clearing of hills and forest for the construction of a two-km. road to connect Ghadalengi, the dam site, to the national highway was taken up. The struggle committee vainly sent memoranda to the Prime Minister and other Central ministers, the chief minister and his colleagues and the high officials concerned.

The seven demands made at the March 26 rally were: Valuation of acquired land at between Rs. 15,000 and Rs. 18,000 per acre; villagewise rehabilitation; priority to displaced people in employment in the project whether it be white-collar jobs or manual labour, and the opening of an employment exchange at Chandil; setting up of small industries to provide better employment opportunities to local people; formation of a committee with adequate representation of local people to keep vigil over the project staff in recruitment of labour, payment of fair wages and proper treatment to adivasi woman; and punishment of project officials found guilty of misusing the materials purchased for construction.

When the state government came to know of the impending agitation it sent its irrigation commissioner to Chandil. He sat with the struggle committee, discussed the issues and gave them an assurance that a broad-based committee comprising officials, politicians and local people would be set up to sort things out. Long after the meeting nothing was heard of the committee. Meanwhile construction work was resumed and the irrigation commissioner visited the site a second time "to see the progress of the work". His visit was closely followed by that of revenue minister U. N. Verma, formerly a leader of Socialist Party, who had himself in the past fought for the people of Chotanagpur. This time Verma was a minister, concerned more about the progress of the project than the plight of the people. After the minister's tour, work on the project gathered pace and more kisans got notices of displacement. The officials began asking the kisans to "come and collect" the compensation for their acquired land. The compensation offered was the same, Rs. 500 per bigha or Rs. 1500 per acre, just a tenth of what the kisans

had been insisting upon. In protest, no kisan went to collect the compensation.

The programme of fast-unto-death duly began on April 23 near the Jaida PWD dak bungalow at Chandil. A camp was built, the satyagrahis bathed in the Subarnrekha, bowed before the Shiva temple and began their fast. The officials took no notice of the satyagraha till April 27. On April 28, the police posted at the Jaida dak bungalow began preventing the men, women and children, who had been coming in thousands to the satyagraha camp very day, from visiting the place. Earlier, word had reached the camp that the deputy commissioner of Singhbhum was to meet them sometime in the day. In the afternoon, K. P. Singh the magistrate posted at Jaida dak bungalow, came to the camp to say that the DC would be there sometime the following day. The deputy commissioner, along with the police superintendent and other officials, was at that time sitting at Chandil dak bungalow, only three kms from Jaida.

The following morning the DC came but sat in the Jaida dak bungalow, a hundred yards from the satyagraha camp and sent for Ghanshyam Mahto, the Forward Bloc MLA. After conferring with the Satyagrahis Mahto decided not to go, and the messenger was sent back with a request for DC to come down to the camp himself. The DC won't; he sent the magistrate K. P. Singh to bring the Forward Bloc leader. Suspecting that it is part of a plan to arrest him, Mahato sneaked away into the jungle that surrounded the dak bungalow. Around noon, some 200 baton-weilding and 40 rifle-carrying policemen emerged from the dak bungalow and attacked the satyagraha camp. They pulled down the camp and herded the satyagrahis into the waiting vans. Those who resisted were charged. The 80-year-old Bimalendu Dasgupta, who had participated in the salt satyagraha with Mahatma Gandhi, was dragged by four policemen and thrown into a truck. All the captive were transferred immediately to the Seraikela sub-jail infamous for mysterious mass deaths of prisoners.

There was a strong reaction to the arrest. The following day, a stream of villagers poured into the camp site, each of them

determined to go on fast. By 11 am. some 8000 people had collected there, including 600 women and several children. Since the old camp had been demolished by the police they began to build a new one. As the camp was being erected, K. P. Singh, the magistrate came there. "You are prohibited from sitting here", he warned. Ghanshyam Mahto appeared before him and said, "But we will". The re-building of the camp went on. Now only roof was to be laid; the boys had brought bamboos from the jungles. The magistrate then ordered teargassing. Some of the people dispersed but for the most part they held their ground. As the teargassing ended they again came together and two young men who had been building the roof climbed up to their workpoint. Suddenly the police guns banged, first on the two young men: they fell down bleeding and dead. The policeman then started firing at the crowd; people ran towards the hills and the jungles on the chase by riflemen. At the end of police action, four people had died; one of them being bayoneted to death.

Defiling 'Development'

Jharkhand had an efficient system of local irrigation in the past. It was constructed and maintained by the people themselves. The march of capitalism, together with ecological, demographic and other natural changes initiated decay of this indigenous irrigation networks. Postcolonial India's single-track drive towards capital-intensive multi-purpose river projects has nearly buried them. These projects, which in theory are designed to feed both agriculture and industry, actually serve capitalism by their real emphasis on hydro-electric power generation and not on irrigation. That irrigation was of secondary importance is borne out also by the failure of all the high-capital river valley projects in Bihar.

The mass resistance to such projects all over Jharkhand has come after a direct experience. The people want an irrigation policy that will leave them undisturbed and provide water at home. This is a desire for popular utilisation of natural resources and local management of the watering devices: a desire to have low-capital, small area irrigation systems to suit one or a cluster of villages.

The denial of this by the bureaucratic capitalism is natural to come. The big-capital-intensive, large-areas projects help centralisation of power in the hands of the bureaucracy; they subordinate the peasants to the cliques of engineers and civil servants. Small capital local networks threaten to decentralise this authority and even to lead the peasants towards self-management. The bureaucrats are, therefore, treating the peasants with open hostility. They are showing their determination to proceed with the big projects come what may; they are showing firmness in evacuating the peasants, refusing to pay them a fair compensation and neglecting their rehabilitation. Evidence of callousness is also in their deliberate violation of several court rulings that the persons displaced by a development project be paid the price that their land may be presumed to fetch after the completion of the project. There is then the failure to keep the promise of giving preference in recruitment to the displaced families. So apart from the irrelevance of the big irrigation projects what is turning the peasants hostile to them is also the bureaucratic barbarity in denying them the treatment they more than deserve.

The callous approach of the bureaucracy towards peasant aspirations will anything but solve the problem. It is futile on the part of the bureaucracy to describe the peasants as being 'anti-development'—which means the people are not interested in their own development! The peasants, on the contrary, are extremely anxious how quickest to ensure for drought years and to increase their production.

A case study of a village in Dhanbad has brought out this point very succinctly. This village, like many villages in Jharkhand, has an undulating landscape and no single irrigation channel can pass through all the fields. The village is divided into many clusters and all the clusters require separate tanks. No government agency has thought it fit even to make a survey. The peasants, who regularly lose their crops without rains, are so eager to have reservoirs dug up that they are prepared to contribute their labour and meagre finance for it. But the government neither gives them any money nor sends any team for surveying, in contrast to the innumerable teams that are despatched and camped at projects like Subarnrekha.

The peasants' cup is more than filled when, after a wrong planning and merciless execution, the bureaucracy uses the media to paint them black—to propagate that the resistance to the big 'development projects' in Jharkhand is being instigated by small groups of violent tribal leaders. To this propaganda, the peasants have replied with a show of solidarity irrespective of tribe, community or caste. As Chandil shows both the tribal and non-tribal peasants are participating in the mass opposition. If more proof is required one can very well look back into recent history when many non-tribal leaders emerged as the spokesman of common peasants in Dhanbad and elsewhere in Jharkhand.

III

The protagonists of the Jharkhand movement at present include the leaders of the BCKU, Chandil peasants and the likes. The movement has often been painted as a regional movement aiming to expel the migrants from Jharkhand and establish a tribal state. Judging by the nature of the movements discussed above one wonders whether such a characterisation is at all near the truth. The cruel oppression and the necessities of effective struggle has taught both the workers and the peasants in Jharkhand the importance of finding dependable allies among other sections of the population. Besides, both of these classes, even in their particular problems, are engaged in struggles against the same force. Whether the question of patronising the mafia or the displacement of the peasants the same bureaucratic capitalism is omnipresent in Jharkhand. The Jharkhand struggle in the present phase has a basic programme—struggle against bureaucratic capitalism.

Probably nowhere outside Jharkhand the exploitation by bureaucratic capital is so naked, the sacred image of state capitalism is so thoroughly blown out, the opposition by people is so well-developed. The people of Jharkhand are thoroughly disillusioned about nationalisation or the nature of developmental programmes of the government. The government, even the one in Delhi, does not exist in abstraction. In Jharkhand they are evident as unsympathetic development officers and corrupt

public sector administrators. The Jharkhand movement is gradually giving a regular shape to struggles against bureaucratic capitalism--the type of struggle that may in a future date be witnessed all over India.

IV

Achievements

Problems and Prospects of Jharkhandi Languages

BISESHWAR PRASAD KESHARI*

Introduction

The fundamental problem of the Jharkhandi languages, like the Jharkhand region, is of existence, identity and development. This entire region has been an easy prey of national and class exploitations. Who-so-ever has looked at it, has done so either with greed or from a romantic point of view. This is the reason why the very identity of the Jharkhand region is in danger. The restlessness born out of this danger is being reflected in various ways and forms in the field of language and literature too.

Though enough scattered materials are available, no systematic history of this region has yet been written**. Hence it

- * The author acknowledges his thanks to his ex-colleague Prof. Razi Ahmed, Deptt. of English, G. L. A. College, Daltongunj, for the kind co-operation and indispensable help rendered by him in translation of the original article written in Hindi.
- ** This author has made recently some preliminary attempts towards it in his *Chotanagpur Ke Itihas; Kuchha Sutra, Kuchha Sandarbha*, in Hindi.

will be quite useful to know in the very beginning that Jharkhand had its own place, uniqueness and importance in the ancient *Janpadas* of India. In course of time, there have been changes in its name and area; still it has maintained its own unique geographical unit, independent history and culture, link-language and economic structure, which is easily recognisable. In the racial and cultural composition of this belt the Pre-Dravidian, Proto-Austroloid, 'Nag' and Aryan races have remained dominant and the synthesis, of their individual cultures, that has occurred in course of several centuries of association with one another, forms the basis of the present Jharkhandi or Nagpuri nationality. Until the Britishers entered into this region (18th Century A.D.), this nationality went on developing unchequered. The spirit of the national unity in the Jharkhand region began to disintegrate with the commencement of the Permanent Settlement (1793 A.D.). With the passage of time, the crack widened, although internal endeavours to cement it were seen from time-to-time. With the passage of brute economic exploitation the British imperialism distributed the composite Jharkhand belt among four different states to wipe out its existence from the map. The languages of this belt have been the victims of this cruel conspiracy.

The Britishers felt the necessity to understand correctly the customs, livelihood patterns, language-literature, history, land-tenure, caste system etc. of this region, first, in order to strengthen the grip of administration and second to propagate Christianity as a complement to it. In this direction they did some concrete works. Dalton's 'Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal' (1872), William Hunter's 'Statistical Account of Bengal, Part-16 (1877), 'List of Monuments in the Chotanagpur Division' (Bengal Secretariate Press, 1896, Second edition), etc. are some rare examples of such efforts. Some such articles are also available in the old files of the 'Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal' and 'Indian Antiquary' where attempts have been made to study the different aspects of this region in a realistic way. But later on, their intention began to change and things started being presented in such a way that the organised collective

resistance could be thwarted. The most to suffer as a consequence of this policy were the 'Sadans' and the 'Sadani' language and literature. Endeavour were made to negate their existence in every possible way. The Sadani language and culture, which was growing into the link-language and culture of the region, was completely ignored. Rai Bahadur Sharat Chandra Rai's 'Munda and their Country' (1912) and 'Oraons of Chotanagpur' (1915) as well as T.S. Macferson and M.G. Hallette's 'Ranchi Gazetteer' (1917) are its glaring examples. The languages of the Oraon and Munda people too were not seen in the right perspective which they deserved. Generally the people of this area were regarded as uncivilised and 'Junglee'. Their uniqueness was disrespected. It will be surprising to note that Encyclopaedia Indica (Part 18, Page-1), defines Munda as a 'special uncivilised Dravida tribe living in Chotanagpur region.' The intension behind presenting the living people's living languages in such a wrong way was to check the developing nationality of this region, so that it might be plundered to their heart's content by subverting it into permanent colony. They had succeeded in their intention to a great extent, undoubtedly, but it had such a terrible effect on the development of the language, literature and nationality that the people of this region have not been able to get rid of it yet. Facts will elucidate the reality.

The Jharkhandi Languages

Broadly speaking there are three groups of languages in the Jharkhand region—Proto-Austroloid, Dravida and Nag which is mostly influenced by Aryan languages. The first group includes languages like Mundari, Santali, Ho, Kharia, Bhumij, Birhor, Turi and Asuri ; in the second come Kudukh (Oraon), Malto, Kisan, Berga, Dhangari, Khendroi ; and in the third group are Nagpuri, Kurmali, Khortha, Pachpergania, Tamadia, Surgujia, Domali, Gaunli, Ganwari etc. which are generally called 'Sadani' or 'Sadari'. The roots of all these three groups of languages are very deep and have their histories in this region; though in this way, in the tradition of the development of the nationality, they have not been studied as yet. Being independent, they have been very intimately linked and influenced by

one another. There are evidences that before the Mundas entered into this region (500 B.C.) there were good settlements of the Asurs and Saraks (Jain Shravakas). However, the civilisation of the Asurs faded out after the advent of the Mundas. The history of the Nagbanshis (Nag Community) begins from Phani Mukhut Rai, the son of Pundarik Nag, in the first century A.D. Much before this, the Nag tribe had resolved its antagonism to Aryans (Brahmins and Kshatriyas). The Aryan influence on Mundas had also begun. There are references of Brahmin minister and priests in the court Madra Munda in the period of Phani Mukut Rai (64 A.D.). Perhaps there were some Dravida tribes, here, from early dates, but Dravida-speaking Oraons came later. One of their branches which speaks Malto, proceeded towards Rajmahal hills. The other branch came to settle in Ranchi plateau through Sone-Valley. They speak 'Kudukh'. The Nagbanshi kings have been both administratively and matrimonially related to Panchet, Keonjhar, Surguja Jaspur, Gangpur, Bonai, Bamda, Midnapur, Bankura etc. *Anek des te manuj mahajan* (respected people from other places) began to settle right from the days of the fourth Nagbanshi king, Pratap Rai (4th century A.D.). From distant places the brave, chivalrous, scholar and priest were invited to protect the region during the Muslim rule. Many people came as refugees from the nearby areas and settled down. People from outside continued to come and settle here from time to time on account of invasions in the form of permanent military camps. This process continued up to the Moghul period, which does not show any major turmoil in the life of the area. People spoke their own languages and Sadani (Sadri) continued to develop as the languages of 'Sadar' (official language) and the language of the commercial field. In fact, Sadani began to take the shape of the largest link-language. However, the 'Sadani' of Munda or Oraon belt have also been acquainted with those languages. The Oraon and Munda speaking people have composed beautiful songs in 'Sadani'; likewise the Sadans have composed such songs in Mundari and Oraon languages. Many folklores of the Oraon, Munda, Santali, Kharia etc. are in Sadani languages.

With the dominance of the East India Company, this region was first attached to Calcutta Presidency and then with South-West Frontier Agency with Benaras as its centre. Due to this, in due course a deep impact of Bengali and Hindi languages also fell upon the languages of this region. On account of its being connected with the borders of Bihar, Bengal, Orissa and M.P., the impact of Maghi, Bhojpuri, Bengali, Oriya and Chattisgarhi fell on its bordering areas especially. As the political and cultural solidarity of the area weakened, the external impact deepened. Attempts were made to expediate the process. The result was, that by the time of the Linguistic-Survey of India by George Grierson, the inner form of its languages was no more the same which it originally was. The languages of the belt were shown without their real identity and glory. Kudukh and Mundari belonged to a totally different language group. Hence they were presented in their own forms to some extent. But Sadani or Sadri, which was the most important link-language of this belt, was thrown into the pocket of Bhojpuri or Maghi. This is the historico-political background of the devouring of the very existence of Sadani or Sadari. Kudukh and Mundari also degenerated and devalued under the same background. The languages of the Asurs-Asuri, Agaria and Korwa were almost dead.

The attitude of the administration towards these languages should have changed after independence. Their due rights should have been restored to them. But whatever has happened, that expectation has not been fulfilled. The problems of the people here are only increasing with the growth of heavy industries and enterprises in the name of development. They are being displaced; imigration is on the increase and the social, economical, political and cultural crises are deepening. Under these circumstances a crisis of existence has cropped up before the languages and literatures of this belt and to ressit it a feeling of cultural revival is growing among the conscious people of the area. There is a general restlessness in the people here to protect and develop their own languages, literatures and culture, now. This restlessness is also reflected in the writings of the students in the magazines of schools and colleges. Re-

solving their inner contradictions, they are trying to resist the external obstacles. It aims at establishing and flourishing the Jharkhandi nationality. These tendencies are clearly discernible in all the languages here to some extent. Let us examine these one by one in some detail.

1. SADANI LANGUAGES

Origin

The mother tongue—of the Sadani is called Sadans. The tribals generally call the non-tribal of the Jharkhand region as 'Sadans'. But technically only such non-tribals will be called Sadans whose mother tongue is Sadani, who have been cradled in the Sadani culture, i.e. those non-tribals who have been living in Jharkhand region since long.

The historical authenticity of Sadani is proved by other popular names of the language (Sadani). One name is 'Nag-puri' (Nagpuria). On account of the influence of the Nagbanshis (the Nag Community) the Jharkhand region is called 'Nag Desh' (Nag country) or Nagpur; hence the language of Nagpur is called Nagpuri. Sadani is also known as Sadari because it was the language of *Sadar*—the official language. The traditional courts were mainly under the dominance of Nagbanshis here. From this point of view also the relationship of Nagpuri language and the 'Nag Jati' is evident. However, Father P.S. Nawrangi opines the origin of Sadani from the word 'Nishad' (*Nagpuria Sadani Boli Ka Vyakaran*) and Pt. Jogendra Nath Tiwari from 'Asurs' (*Nagpuri Bhasha Ka Sankhpta Parichay*). Recently this concept is gaining ground that Kurmali is the original form of Nagpuri. Basically, Kurmali is the language of Kurmi people, who are a tribe of Nag nationality. Lakhikant Mahto and Basant Kumar Mehta are the chief exponent and propagator of such concept. They consider that Khortha language is corrupt name of Kurmali itself. (*Shalpatra* 2, Page-35-39 and 4, Page 36-41). These facts prove that Sadani is originally the language of the 'Nag Jati', which has been developing and transforming in course of time due to the impact of Aryan, Proto-Austroloid and Dravidian languages.

But probably in order to satisfy the selfish economic and political interests, this fact was concealed. Basing upon the 'Notes on the Ganwari Dialect of Lohardaga of Chotanagpur' written by the first Bishop of S.P.G. Mission, Ranchi, Rev. E.H. Whittley, Dr. Sir George Grierson, referring to Nagpuria, declared it as a sub-dialect of Bhojpuri in the Linguistic Survey of India, Vol.-1, Part-1, and Vol.5, Part-2. Dr. Udaya Narayan Tiwari, in his thesis '*Bhojpuri Bhasha Aur Sahitya*' accepted the views of Dr. Grierson in toto and a blind tradition of accepting Nagpuria as a part of Bhojpuri commenced with it.

A second enlarged edition of 32 pages of Rev. E. Whitley's aforesaid grammar was published in 1914 under the title 'Notes on Nagpuria Hindi' in which Nagpuria has been named as Eastern Maghi. Some new conditions developed in the fifties. It was proposed that Purulia district be transferred to West Bengal. Attempts to establish Maghi language also started. In this context, Dr. Bishwanath Prasad in his 'Linguistic Survey of Sadar Sub-division of Manbhum and Dhalbhum' (Singhbhum), and Dr. Sampatti Aryani in her partly published thesis '*Maghi Vyakaran Kosh*' have called Kurmali, Khortha, Panchpargania etc., as Eastern Maghi. Perhaps on these grounds Nagpuria has been labelled as Eastern Maghi in the Census Report of India, 1961. Together with this Nagpuria, Sadani, Sadri, Ganwari, Panchpargania, Tamadia etc. have been mentioned as different dialects (Census of India, 1961, part 2 C).

A new tendency is developing to label Bengali influenced Kurmali, Nagpuria etc. as Jharkhandi Bangala. The propounder of this view is Dr. Dharendra Nath Shaha, a professor in Ranchi University.

Had the 'Grammar of the Nagpuria Sadani Language' of Rev. Father C. Bouckhout of Catholic Mission, Ranchi, been published, such confusions might not have spread. This book based on direct field work with arduous labour had been completed in 1906. But unfortunately he passed away on 14th of August 1907 at Calcutta, prematurely, and this book has yet not seen the light of day. Father P. S. Nawrangji edited the complete book once again and saved it. Two theses of Fr. Bouckhout are worth considering.

1. "The present grammar will perhaps show that Nagpuri cannot be placed under any of these three headings as a sub-dialect, and, therefore, must be considered as a fourth form of Bihari". M.S., Introduction, Page-2."
2. "If the archaic character of Nagpuri is concealed, it throws the advent into Chotanagpur of Aryan colonists 'Sadani' far back in history." M. S., Page-4.

These are the sources on whose basis Fr. P. S. Nawrangi, Pt. Yogendra Nath Tiwari, Prof. Keshari Kumar, Dr. S. K. Goswami and the present author have committed the error to consider Nagpuri as the offshoot of 'Magdhi Apbhransh.' In fact this angle to understand any language is incorrect, for language is basically the possession of a tribe or nationality and its rise and fall depends upon the rise or fall of the tribe or nationality. In this light truth seems to be, that original language of the 'Nag Jati' influenced by the Aryan, Dravidian and Proto-Austroloid languages developed as Sadani or Nagpuri in due course. This is the basis of the originality of Nagpuri or Sadani.

Area and Population

Ignoring these facts, knowingly or unknowingly, the Census reports also could not indicate the correct figure of Sadani speaking people. The most astonishing fact is that there is not even the *slightest reference* of Sadani speaking people in Bihar and Orissa Census reports, though millions of Sadani speaking people live in the southern plateau of Bihar and the northern hilly areas of Orissa, whereas in M. P. their number has been shown as 56,150.* The second blunder is that the one and the same Nagpuri language has been categorised at some places as Sadani or Sadri and at other places as Nagpuria (Eastern Maghi) as the mother tongue**. In the same way Kurmali, Khortha, Panchpargania, Tamadia, Surgujia Domali etc. have also been presented as different mother tongues so as to allow the real number of the Sadans to be scattered and vanquished

* Vide, Census of India, 1961, Vol.-I, Part-2 C (ii), Language Table.

** Vide, Census of India, 1961-Vol. 4, [Bihar Part 2C, Mother-tongue table C.

presented as different mother tongues so as to allow the real number of the Sadans to be scattered and vanquished. Probably it happened so because so far a concrete conception and image of the different names and forms of Sadani has not emerged among the so-called scholars.

Dissociating from such blunders it will not be out of way to put the number of Nagpuri speaking people near about at two and half crores, taking the various forms of Sadani or Nagpuri in a collective way. The total population of the proposed Jharkhand state (16 Districts) as per the census of 1971 is 3,05,98,991 out of which 93,39,769 are tribals. The number of people settling more recently in this region from outside is nearly 15%, i.e. 45 to 50 lacs. Many groups of Adivasis (tribals) have accepted Sadani as their mother-tongue and most of them are acquainted with it in the form of the second language. Judging from this angle the logic of the above estimate may well be understood. Hence there should be no objection to accept Sadani as the Lingua Franca of the cherished Jharkhand State spread over 1,87,646 square kilometers. There is a sizeable number of Sadani speaking people in the tea-gardens of Assam and Bengal in Sunderban area and a few areas of Champaran apart from the Jharkhand region.

Inner Unity and Uniqueness

The chief popular names and forms of Sadani language are Sadri, Nagpuria, Nagpuri, Gaunli, Ganwari, Kurmali, Khortha (Khotta), Panchpargania, Tamadia, Golwari, Surgujia and Domali etc. Hearing or seeing so many names and forms such a concept is formed as if these are different languages or dialects. But it becomes obvious, considering them from linguistics, grammatical, historical, social, cultural and rhythmic point of view, that there is an inner unity among them despite local variations. The dialects of many a tribes were moving towards taking the shape of the language of a nationality respectively, but this process was impeded because of historical factors and because of external influences, and therefore, a gulf started widening among them. In a research

article of mine published recently I have tried to show this fact to some extent. (vide, *Parishad Patrika*, Patna, October, 1979) A.K. Jha too had highlighted this unity in one of his essays read at William Carey Study and Research Centre, Gossner College, Ranchi.

Father C. Bouckhout, Father Peter Shanti Nawrangi, Pt. Yogendra Nath Tiwari, Prof. Keshari Kumar, Dr. Sbarwan Kumar Goswami, Sri Praphulla Kumar Roy, Lakhi Kant Mahto and myself have shown the difference of Sadani or Nagpuri (Kurmali) languages from Bhojpuri and Maghi. Now this fact has almost been accepted that Sadani or Nagpuri is an independent language and has its own characteristics. Dr. Udaya Narayan Tiwari acknowledges it in a letter written to Dr. Goswami, although Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee has been hesitating to accept this fact in this context in a reply to the letter of Prafulla Kumar Roy. However, the independence of a language is relative. On this account so many words and their uses of Bhojpuri, Maghi, Bengali etc. are present in Nagpuri. Yet the basic point is the nature of the language—its phonic and grammatical characteristics, idioms and literary-cultural background which differentiate it from one another. On this scale Sadani or Nagpuri is undoubtedly an independent language and there is such unity and closeness in its inner form which cannot be doubted.

Literary Development

Perhaps the literature of no other folk language is so rich as the ancient literature of Nagpuri language taken all together. Together with a large store of oral folk-lore and astonishing classical poetic tradition had developed in this language right from the 15th and 16th centuries. Save the 'Sufi' poetic tradition, almost all other poetic tradition have continued from very early times. A special current of the *Nirgun Kabirites* had made here its own identity. A rich tradition of 'Ram' and 'Krishna' poetry too is available here. The rainbow beauty of the 'Krishna poetry' here is a thing to be appreciated. There is a beautiful development of Christian divine literature both in prose and poetry. But the greater part of these materials are still unpublished and are

preserved in private collections. Even the Nagpuri Dictionary compiled by Fr. Nawrangi is still to be published. There are about 20 thousand songs of about 500 poets, both ancient and new, in the private collection of this author too. Late Dhani Ram Bakshi of Chaibasa had made some appreciable attempts some thirty years ago for their collection, edition and publication from his '*Hitaishi Karyalaya*'. A few other writers and poets have published their works on their own. A new prose-poetry literature in Nagpuri is fast developing after 1960, since the establishment of *Nagpuri Bhasha Parishad* (Nagpuri Language Association, (Ranchi)), the opening of a unit of All India Radio at Ranchi, the establishment of Ranchi University and after the intense experience of crisis created by the big industries and projects. Hundreds of writers and poets are busy today in beautifying all its branches of prose and poetry. Other than those referred to, names like Sri Niwas Panuri, Sharda Prasad Sharma, Sahni Upendra Pal Nahan, Mrityunjaynath Sharma, Durga Nath Rai, Nacemuddin Mirdaha, Madu Mansuri Hansmukh, Suresh Kumar Rai, Lal Ranvijay Nath Shahdev, Meghnath Ohder, Kshitish Kumar Rai, Mahabir Nayak, Mukund Baraik, Devi Sharan Malar, Bishwanath Prasad Nagar, Bishwanath Raj Dasaundhi, Angad Mahto, Narayan Mahto, Prof. Parikshit Singh Chaoudri, Kashinath Singh, Mohammad Haneef, Binod Tiwari, Badri Vishal, Naresh Prasad Singh, Ashutosh Tiwari, Krishna Prasad Bhagat, Ayta Oraon, Akloo Singh (Lalit Mohan Bharti), Joytilal Mahadani, Ashutosh, Srikant, Pramod, Kumari Vasanti, Justin Ekka, Manohar Minz, Rabindra Nath Manjhi, Dayal Baraik, Lakshman Baraik etc. have become inseparable from the contemporary development of Nagpuri literature. The '*Meghgeet*', '*Viplavi Mahan*', '*Patai Ek Koinar Ke*' etc of Sri Sharda Prasad Sharma are such works which may be compared with any rich poetic literature of any other language. Similarly in the field of prose Prafulla Kumar Rai's '*Sonjhair*' occupies a very high place. It will be categorised as the first major artistic creation of Nagpuri prose. His unpublished '*Shankar : Gotek Jingi*' is an unparalleled living picture of Nagpuri life.

There is a tradition of paper magazines, too, in Sadani which in all probability began with the magazine '*Badaik*' of

Dhani Ram Bakshi. Recently Magazines and papers like 'Khortha', 'Matribhasha' and 'Titki' from Dhanbad, 'Nagpuri' from Ranchi; 'Shankhnad' from Simdega; 'Jai Jharkhand' from Dalitonganj; 'Gharaia Guith' from Shillong (Meghalaya); and 'Banphool' again from Ranchi have come out from time to time. Hindi papers magazines, 'Ranchi Express', 'Chotanagpur Sandesh', 'Ranchi Times', 'Adivasi' etc. give it place in their pages. Of special importance in this context has been the publication of 'Shalpatra' with whose very few issues only Sri Talwar has created a new stir and consciousness in the literary and cultural life of this region. Endeavours are going on towards the development of Nagpuri music and dance incessantly apart from literature. Besides, Pandey Birendranath Rai, Bindeshwari Mishra, Suresh Kumar Rai, Naemuddin, Nadu Mansuri, Sita Devi, Birendra Narayan Tiwari, Ayodhya Prasad Keshari, Banmali Narayan Tiwari etc. are devoted in the meditation of its melody. Upendra Nath Singhdev, king of Silli, has written a valuable book 'Chotanagpur Tal Manjari' on the rhythm and beat of Mandar and Dhol, after long experiments and meditations. Angad Mahto has tried to enrich the 'Choh' Dance in Ranchi. Nagpuri programmes are on the air everyday from All India Radio, Ranchi. It occupies an important place in 'Hamari Duniya', programme.

Nagpuri has been introduced in the Intermediate and Bachelor courses of composition in the Ranchi University. Under the course of linguistics it is being taught there (Ranchi University) in Post Graduate classes of Hindi. The Research theses of Monika Jordan from Bonn University (West Germany), and of Dr. S.K. Goswami, Dr. Biseshwar Prasad Keshari and Dr. Gobind Sahu from Ranchi University have already been accepted. Prof. Kumari Basanti, Prof. Girdhari Ram Gonjhu and S.N. Singh etc. are engaged in research on Nagpuri and Kurmali etc.

The reference to the theses of Dr. Nand Kishore Singh and Dr. Bankim Chandra Mahto is also essential in this context. Both of them have proved Kurmali to be an independent language,. The former had obtained the degree from Santiniketan in 1962.

II. MUNDARI LANGUAGES

Mundari, Santali, Ho and Kharia—these are the four major languages of Munda group. These are the languages of the different tribes (Kabeela) of Munda nationality. These languages too have an inner unity and individual characteristics like the different forms of Sadani. There is much similarity in their vocabulary and grammatical construction, though there is slight difference in their pronunciation (Phonemes). Which of these pronunciations is original, which is imported, modified and changed due to external influences may be a subject of research. From their similarities it appears that a process was in vogue among different tribes towards the development of a nationality, but it stopped because of the imperialistic policy and attitude of the Britishers and that state of stagnation continues even today. The people of Munda, Santal, Ho and Kharia tribes have been divided into different states. Their internal oneness is fading out because of the impact of the languages of different states. Their unity was not given that importance which was given to their difference. Today these languages are being written in different scripts. Bangla script in Bengal, Oriya in Orissa and Devnagri in Bihar and M.P. are the medium of their writings now. As a result of this, people of one province are growing ignorant of the creations of their own people of another province. In order to solve this problem it has been proposed from time to time to use either the Roman script, *Ol Chiki* (Santali) explored by Raghunath Murmu, or Varang Chhiti (the ancient script of Ho) explored by Hirla Lakho Bodra. About 30 years back Ranka Oraon and Kohas Toppo had prepared another independent script in Kudukh language. Such necessity has arisen on the one hand so that the phonemes of these languages may acquire correct pronunciation (the problems of spelling i.e. orthography, are also attached with it) and may maintain their corresponding unity; but on the other hand it has its own difficulties. Besides the burden upon the students of learning a new script, the problems of typing and printing emerge in a formidable form. Therefore, the whole labour seems like a wayward wandering. The basic issue is of establishing unity of the nationality and of joining it with the main stream of the Nation. Only the formation of Jharkhand

province can help, whose most common scientific script may be Devnagri modified according to need. From this, they can understand one another, others may also understand them easily, and protecting their identity they can become one with national current. Such is the logic of Dr. Nirmal Minz too which he has propounded in the context of the solution of the problem of the script for Kudukh language. (Vide, his unpublished article entitled 'Kudukh' (Oraon), Page 6).

(a) Santali

Santali is the most widely spoken language of the Mundari group. The number of people speaking Santali, according to the Census of 1961, is 31,28,987. Out of them 67,262 are in Assam ; 15,82,016 are in Bihar ; 3,58,262 are in Orissa and 11,21,447 are in West Bengal. The highest density of the Santals is in the Santhal Parganas of Bihar and the language of that place is recognised as the standard Santali.

"Santali is a non-Aryan language. Many scholars of linguistics have placed it in the Malepolinasian family in the international field of language. Many categories have been proposed from time to time for the Santali languages family of India. Maxmuller treated Santali, Mundari, Ho etc. as separate from Dravidian languages. Dr. Grierson tried to place them under the 'Kol-language family'. But this categorisation could not come into force. Although the tribes Santal, Munda, Ho etc. belong to the same root, the Munda people have some special position. In comparison to the word 'Santal', the word 'Munda' is more ancient. Therefore, some scholars have named the Santhali, Mundari, Ho etc. as the languages of Munda-language family, and this name has found the widest recognition. However, one name of Santal during the Middle Ages has been 'Kherwar' ; hence some people have categorised Santali as included in the Kherwari-family".*

Literary Development

Like other Jharkhandi languages there is a store house of oral folk lores and folk tales in Santali W.G. Archer published two collections of 3,000 Santal folk lores in 1942-45, titled 'Hod-

* Doman Sahu 'Samir' *Santal Bhasha Aur Uska Sahiya*, *Sankchhipta Parichaya* (in Hindi), Bihar Rashtra Bhasha Parishad, Patna-3, Page-1.

Sereng' and 'Dong Sereng'. In 1924 P.O. 'Boarding published a collection of Santal folk-tales in Roman script under the title of 'Hod-Kahaniko'. A dozen of books regarding Christianity were written in Santali between 1900 and 1925. Mr. Boarding also translated the Bible in Santali and published one or two collections of devotional songs.

Original works in different branches of literature began to be written as the spread of education and affection for their own language developed, among Santals. In the field of poetry, beginning with Paul Jujhar Soren's 'Onodhen Baha Dal-Wak' (Bough of Flowers) in Roman script in 1935, Panchanan Marandi's 'Sereng Ita' (Seed of Song) in Bengali Script in 1948, Thakur Prasad Murmu's 'Even Adang' (Songs of Inspiration) in Bengali script in 1951, and Sharda Prasad Kisku's 'Bhurka Ipil' (Venus—the morning star) in Devanagari script in 1953 were published subsequently. Doman Sahu 'Samir's 'Disum Baba' (Father of Nation) was published in Devnagri script in 1953.

In the field of fiction, the first novel of R.R.K. Rapaz was published in 1946, under the title of 'Hadmawak Ato' (The village of Hadma). This infact is a translation of the English Novel 'Hadma's village' of R. Carsteyers. The second novel—'Muhila Chechet Dai' (Lady Teacher Muhila)—was written in 1952 by Nunku Soren. The first collection of short-stories of Santali, 'Kukmu' (The Dream) in Devnagri script was produced in 1952, whose writer is Balkishore Basuki. The second collection is of 'Samir'—'Bulmunda' (The Drunkard). He also translated some of the famous stories of Premchand.

The firsts to try their hands in the field of Drama are Ragunath Murmu and Rup Narayan Shyam. The former wrote two dramas' namely, 'Bidu Chandan' and 'Kherwar Veer' in the Bengali script in 1942 and 1952 respectively. The latter wrote 'Ale Ato' (Our village) in the Devnagari script in 1953.

At present hundreds of poets and writers are devoted to the development and enrichment of Santali literature. Shivilal Kisku, Shikar Kisku, Jettha Kumar Chonde, Babulal Murmu, Lodha Marandi, Narayan Soren, Bariar Hembrom, Shiv Ram Prakash, Krishna Kumar Murmu, Sujal Soren, Chaitanya

Murmu, R.S. Kisku, Munshi Chandra Murmu, Durga Prasad Murmu, Vetka Hansdak, Yogendra Hemborm, Chitu Tuddu, Aditya Mitra Santali, Sheetal Prasad Murmu, Hembrom Ojha, Naseeruddin Mian, Bhuvneshwar Soren, Annada Kisku Rapaz etc. are some writers whose works are regularly published.

The first magazines of Santali language 'Hod Hopon Ren Reda' (Santal friend) Boarding in 1890 which later on continued in the name of 'Reda' was published by Mr. Hod'. It used to be printed in Roman script. The second magazines in the Roman script 'Marsal Taban' (Our Light) came out in 1946 from the Mission. From 1947 'Hod Sombad' in the Devanagari script is being published by the government and Doman Sahu 'Samir' is the editor of this magazine.

It is a matter of satisfaction that some appreciable efforts are being made for the development of Santali language by All India Santali Literary Parishad and Santal Pabadia Sewa Mandal. 'Primary Readers' have been written in this language for the primary schools. It is being taught upto Secondary Standard. Bhagalpur University has introduced it partly in the courses of study of M.A. class. Besides the literary broadcasts from All India Radio Ranchi, the Calcutta unit broadcasts news bulletin in Santali.

(b) Mundari

Munda is an ancient tribe and has its own history. This tribe has achieved such glorious heights from the revolution of Birsa which is well known. The total population of Munda tribe according to the Census of 1961 is 7,36,524. Out of them 5,74,842 are settled in the southern plateau of Bihar. They are dominant in the south-eastern part of Ranchi District. The rest are settled near about it, in Singhbhum, in the northern part of Orissa, and some in M.P. and Assam etc. and no references to them in the language table of the Census (1961) seems to be strange. It is interesting to note that the Census of 1941 enumerated as many as 1,03,148 people in Bengal; 71,541 in Orissa and 6,338 in M.P. besides 5,19,743 people in Bihar.

In the Linguistic Survey of India, Sir George Grierson has placed Mundari, Birhor, Turi and Asuri under the Kherwari

branch of Mundari family. According to Ranchi Gazetteer (1970) :

“Mundari is spoken by 94 per cent of the Munda race and also by the inferior artisan castes living in the Munda villages, such as the Pans and Lohras. The Oraons in the neighbourhood of Ranchi town also speak a form of Mundari which is known as Horo-lia-jagar. ”(Page 93).

Literary Development

There is a rich store of traditional folk-lore and folk-tales in Mundari language too. In 1943, W.G. Archer had published a collection of 1641 Munda songs. ‘Bansuri Baj Rahi’—a collection of the Munda songs of Jagdish Trigunayat, was published by Bihar Rashtra Bhasha Parishad in 1957. A collection of Munda folk-tales of Trigunayat has also been brought out with the help of the government.

The greatest contribution to the study of Munda race and its language and culture has been that of Father John Hoffman of the Catholic Mission. Not only did he edit the voluminous Encyclopaedia Mundarika in 14 parts but also prepared the grammar of Mundari. In addition, a translation of Bible and collections of devotional songs were published in Munda language by him.

The contemporary literature is fast developing in Mundari. The tradition of Classical lyrics in Mundari begins perhaps with the lyrics of Budu Babu. Very recently poetic works of Ramdayal Munda, Dulai Chandra Munda and Kande Munda (‘Sepered Durang’, ‘Seled’, ‘Hisir’ and ‘Sasanba’) have been published. Sagu Munda’s ‘Munda Ko-a Itihas’ is a new contribution to the Mundari prose. In the words of P. Ponet, the unpublished book ‘Matura-a-Kani’ of Menes Ram-Oedeya is the treasurer of the life of Munda race in Mundari fiction. At present, Suleman Buding, Sukhdev Ram Berdiyar, Baldev Munda, Lakshman Sulanki, Bhagwan Singh, Hassadev Munda, Moso Ram Munda, Jagjiwan Singh Munda, Acharya Birsa Hans, Kashinath Singh ‘Kandey’, Gandura Munda, Miss Pyari Tuti, Govinda Toppo, Parasnath Thakur, Kamal Toppo, Jai Masih Purti, Bisu Lakra etc. are writing in different branches

of Mundari literature. M M. Mundu, with his lifelong labour has prepared a large dictionary of Mundari which is waiting for publication. Father P. Ponet is giving his best services to the study and development of Mundari language.

There is a historical importance of 'Abua Disum' and 'Jagar Sada' in the field of Mundari magazines. mundari works are also published partially in other papers and magazines.

In 1936-38 Prof. Heyward made considerable effort for the development of Mundari language and literature, and brought out a number of pamphlets from the Adult Education Board of the Government of Bihar. Many cultural committees for various tribal races have been constituted by the Tribal Development Department of the Govt. of Bihar, in which provisions have been made for the collection, research and publication of materials related to these languages, literatures and cultures. However, it seems that there has been little benefit from it. Recently, some works have been done by the 'Hodo Senda Samiti' of Ranchi. The Organisation has prepared text books for the 'Composition Course' of Intermediate and Bachelor Classes of Ranchi University and those have been published by the same University. All India Radio, Ranchi broadcasts the literary works of this language. But much is still left to be done for the development of the Mundari language.

(c) Ho

"Mundari, Ho, Santali, Bhumij, Birhor, Asur, Koda, Korwa, Kuru, Kharia, Juwang, Sawar, Garba etc. languages of India are very close to each other from the point of view of vocabulary, grammar, composition of language etc. Among them between Ho and Mundari there is so much of closeness and oneness that we cannot accept them as two languages. Their 'phonemic unity' is a complete witness of their closeness. Truly, both of them belong to the Austric language family. The number of their speakers is above 12 lacs in India. There is the same difference between Mundari and Ho languages which is to be found between the Maithili of Madhubani and Samastipur; in the Bhojpuri of Ara and Chapra and in the English of Oxford and Cambridge.

"The Munda people pronounce 'd (s), but the 'Ho's do not. The 'hodo' of Munda is the 'ho' (man) of Ho, and similarly 'Koda' is 'Koa, (boy), 'Kudi' is 'Kui' (girl) and 'Oda' is Oa (house). The pronunciation of Ho is more delicate and full of elasticity. Perhaps art and delicacy is especially filled in the nature of Ho tribe. They are greater lovers of music and dance in comparison to the Mundas. The tendency to enjoy the beauties of life is more in them. Their houses are the living witness of their tastes, their delicateness and their aesthetic and artistic senses.

".....Dr. Grierson has used the word 'Laraka Kol' for them.....The Hos are greater lovers of freedom and more self-confident than the Mundas. They have faith in their language, religion and culture."

This long reference to the Ho tribe is of Jaidev Das 'Abhinav'. He expressed these ideas in his essay '*Ho Bhasha Aur Uska Sahitya*' read at Bihar Rashtra Bhasha Parishad, Patna 1959 (vide, Page-1-2). Besides this, Babulal Murmu has given a fine introduction of Ho literature in the Independence Day issue, 1974, of 'Adivasi Patrika' published by the Public Relations Deptt. of the Bihar Government (vide, Page 26-29).

In the Census of 1961, in Bihar and Orissa the numerical strength of Ho tribe has been given at 4,44,775 and 2,03,052 respectively. There is some population of Ho tribe in West Bengal, M.P. and Assam too.

Literary Development

* Here also, the initiative was taken by the foreigners. More prominent among them were S.R. Tickel, G. Campbell, Dalton, Grierson, Linoj Verroj etc. They were followed by Sukumar Halder, T.C. Das, N. Chatterjee, D.N. Majumdar etc. who too paid their attention towards studying different aspects of lives of Ho tribe and their language. Bhim Ram Sulanki and Michael Tigga have worked on its grammar.

The first attempt to collect the Ho folk songs was done by Sukumar Halder which was published in the journal of Bengal and Orissa Research Society in 1915, 1916 and 1922. 'Ho Durang' of W.G. Archer and 'Songs of the Hos' of Gopi Nath Sen were

published in 1946. Kanu Ram Deogam also published a collection named 'Ho Durang'. An English translation of a Ho folk-lore was also published by him in 'Man in India' (Ranchi) in 1928. Some folk tales are collected in the 'Chapaked Kahani' of Satish Kumar Koda 'Sengel'. There is a collection of Ho songs in 'Disum Jari Mage Durang' of Shivcharan Birua and in 'Tiriya Dudgar' of Karunakar Tiriya. Jaidev Das 'Abhinav' has added a collection of Ho-marriage songs 'Sarjomba Dumba', to the literary world in 1958.

The lyrics of Dumbi Ho have prime importance in the literary development of Ho-poetry. His songs are sung in every village in Kolhan region. 'Rumal' of Satish Kumar Koda 'Sengel' is a literary work worth mentioning. Shri Koda was the headmaster of Palamau Zila School until very recently. I felt that the rhythm and beauty of the *Shlokas* of Geeta have been excellently preserved in their translation by him into Ho songs. I had printed five songs from it in my magazine 'Jai Jharkhand'. The complete work is so far unpublished. Perhaps the collection of the poems of B.K.S. Jarai have already been published. At present Balram Pat Pingua, Shri Ram Hembrom, Anant Kumar Pingua, Shankar Lal Gagrai, Gopi Nath Tiya, Hirla Lakho Bodra, Yogendra Muni, Bishwanath Bodra, Devedranath Sinhku, Songa Sundi, B.L. Tamsoy, Muni Chakradhar Guiyan, Budhram Hembrom, J.C. Hessa, Harihar Singh Sirka, Babu Lal Murmu etc. are devoted to the study, creation and development of the language.

To the best of my knowledge there is no independent magazine of Ho. Their works appear in prints mostly through *Adivasi* (Ranchi). Besides, Hirla Lakho Bodra, Yogendra Muni have also contributed to the solution of the problem of its script.

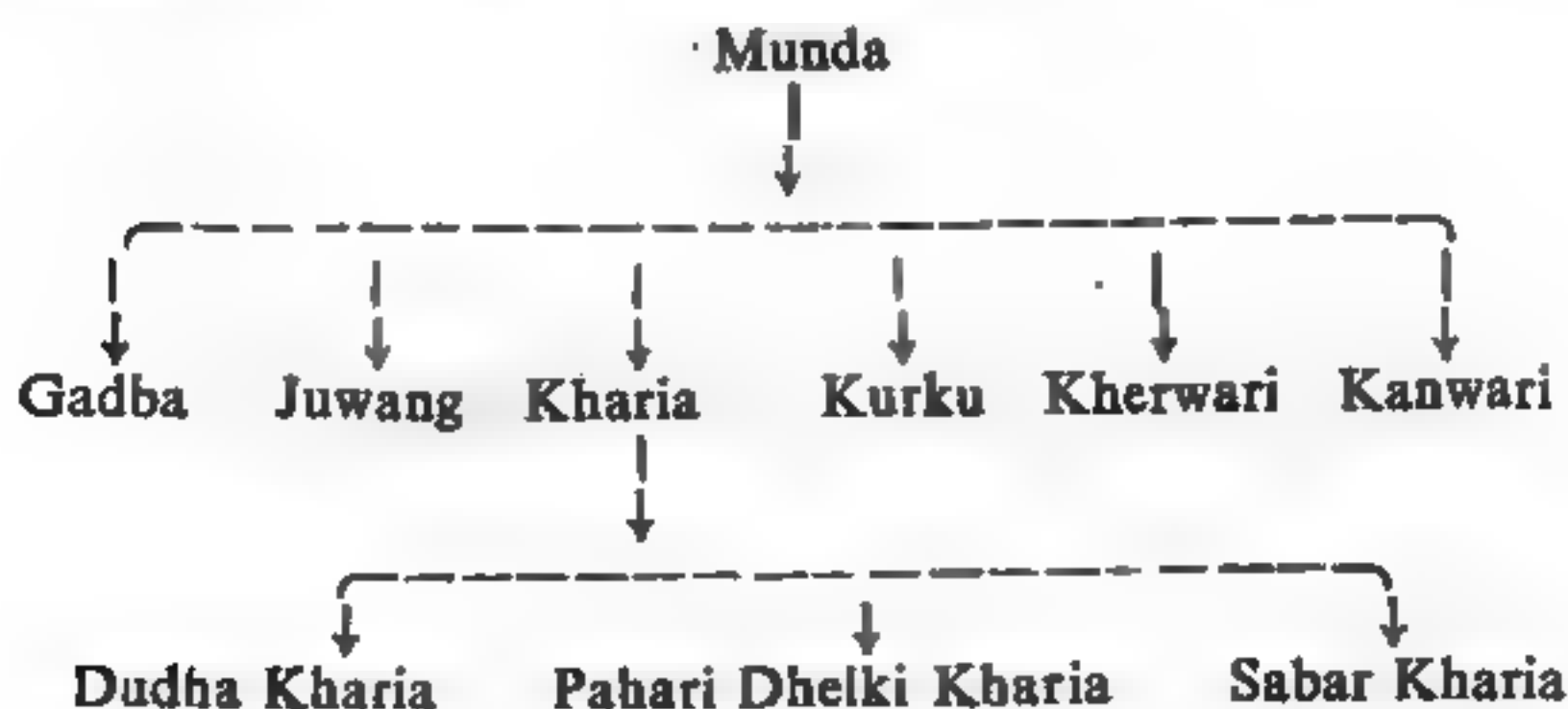
Recently 'Readers' have been published in Ho for the primary classes from Bihar Text Book Committee. It has been included in the courses of the dialects for the post graduate classes in Bhagalpur and Ranchi Universities. There is a syllabus of Ho in the course of *Sahityalankar* examination of Hindi Vidyapeeth. But there is no arrangement for its regular teaching anywhere. Like that of other languages, the songs and literature of Ho are being broadcast from the All India Radio, Ranchi.

(d) Kharia

"The Kharia speaking folk are settled in the South-Western parts of Chotanagpur and Bihar State. The speakers of Kharia are found in the greater parts of the far off scattered villages in the areas on both the banks of river SouthKoel. From Gumla, Lohardaga, Bagdu hill etc. to Basia through Sisai and towards south west in the valley of river Shankh, the Kharia people are settled in a sizeable number. Touching the borders of Orissa, this region intrudes into Orissa to some extent. Kharia people have been living near Puri since a pretty old time. The Kharia people may also be located in M.P., especially in the neighbourhood areas of Jaspur-low valleys and in the Balua Bahar Kasba near Tapkara. There are Kharias settled in certain areas of Bengal too, but most of them use their own language rarely.....According to 'Note A Atrid Doku-menter' (7th September, 1970) the total number of Kharia People is 1,09,000. Out of them 95,000 speak their own Kharia language."—M. Dungdung, *Shalpatra*, 'Kharia Bhasha: Khsetra Aur Vikas', Pages 46-47.

As per the Census of 1961 the number of Kharia speaking people only in Bihar were 96,016.

Gagan Chandra Banerjee considers Kharia language to be similar to and influenced by Mundari language. (Introduction to Kharia language, 1894) but Dr. Grierson does not include it in the family of Munda language (Linguistic Survey of India, Part-4). Resolving this conflict correctly, Prof. Rose Tete has presented a table in the following way :



Literary development

Besides Gagan Chandra Banerjee and Grierson, Dr. H.S. Biligiri (Kharia Phonology, Grammar and Vocabulary), Julius Ba-a (*Thetha Kharia Ka Vyakaran*-unpublished), Dr. M. Dungdung (*Hindi Aur Kharia : Ek Tulnatmak Aur Vishleshanatmak Adhyayan*-a research thesis accepted by Ranchi University), Julius Sukesar Ba a (*Kharia Da-a Sanskriti*) have done commendable labour to study the language and culture of Kharia. R.P. Sabu is engaged in a comparative study of Kharia, Nagpuri and Hindi grammar for his research thesis.

Jatru Oraon, Pyare Kerketta, Gopal Kharia etc. are trying to develop the Kharia language, literature and culture. With the formation of the Kharia Sahitya Samiti it has received new force. A tri-monthly magazine 'Tardi' too is now being published. It has a place in the broadcasts of Ranchi Radio Station.

At present Mansukh Kharia, Rose Tete, Jatru Kharia, Patras Kullu, Saroj Kerketta etc. are trying to add literary beauty to the language. Their works are quite often published in the magazine 'Adivasi' (Ranchi). Jatru Kharia has published 'Kharia Along'—a collection of Kharia songs.

III. KUDUKH LANGUAGES

"The Kudukh-language of the Oraon is a sub-dialect of that Dravida-language family, which is spoken by the largest number of people in India after the Aryan languages. There are four sub-sections of the Dravida-language family—(a) Dravida wherein are Tamil, Malayalam and Kannad—the three literary rich, major languages and Tulu, Kargu, Toda and Kota—the dialects of backward classes. The language of the thousands of inhabitants of Laksha Dweep is a variation of Malayalam; (2) Middle group—Gondi, Kudukh, Malto, Kui or Kandhi and Kolami are the five dialects spoken by the aboriginals of Middle India; (3) Telgu, whose literature is quite rich and (4) Brahui, the dialect of Baluchistan which is spoken by one lac seventy thousand people and which, "to give the evidence of the arrival of the Dravida in some ancient time from the banks of Mediterranean Sea, and at some other time, of their connections with the civilization of Mohenjo-Daro and

Harappa, is maintaining her independent existence in the midst of the Baluchi, Persian and Sindhi languages with great difficulties".*

According to the Census of India, 1941, Part 7, Bihar (Page-47-50), "the total population of the Oraons is nearly one million, from which six and a half lacs are in Bihar. Out of that, five lacs thirteen thousands are found in Ranchi District alone. The north-western part of Ranchi is called the Oraon belt, Besides Bihar, sixtyfour thousand in Gangapur of Orissa and 1,62,60 people are living in the old princely states of Chhatisgarh, Jaspur, Udaipur, Surguja, Korla etc., now in the eastern part of M.P. The number of the hilly people speaking all the three dialects of Malto is one lac seventy thousand. They have also made a colony of their own in the tea-gardens of Jalpaiguri." (Ibid., Page-2).

The number of Oraons has been shown as 5,48,648 in Bihar, 2,74,379 in M.P. and total as 8,23,027 in the 'Language Table' of the Census of India, 1971, Vol. I, Part-2C (ii). Their population in the whole of India is 11,41,804.

But according to Dr. Nirmal Minz, besides the above mentioned regions, the Oraons live in Mirzapur of U.P.; Purulia of West Bengal; Champaran, Purnia and Bhagalpur of Bihar, Kachhar plains, Kamrup, Darang, Noagaon, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur of Assam; Andaman Islands and in some parts of Nepal bordering Champaran district.

Unity of Different Forms

The different names and forms of Oraon languages are Malto, Berga, Dhangri, Khendroi, Kisan etc. Malto is the language of the hilly people of Raj Mahal. Comparing Kudukh and Malto with Tamil, Malayalam, Kannad etc. on the basis of their noun, pronoun, tense and numerical adjectives Dr. Grierson has declared the unity of the two (Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. IV, Page 284). Berga and Kisan are spoken in Gangapur (Sundergarh) and Sambhalpur districts of Orissa; Dhangri in Champaran and Khendroi in the Jaspur region of Raigarh district of Madhya Pradesh. They are, in fact, not the

* Jagdish Trigunayat's essay, 'Oraon Bhasba Aur Sahitya', read at Bihar Rashtra Bhasba Parishad, 1958, Page 2-3).

dialects of Oraon but different names of the same. Says Dr. Nirmal Minz in this context—

“The above are not the dialects of Kurukh. They are thus described because the Kurukh people are known by these names on the basis of their occupation, Dhangars are the agricultural labourers, Kisans are the farmers, and so on. Outside Chotanagpur region Kurukhs are known mostly by what they do, rather than what they primarily are as a people” (Kurukh (Oraon) M.S., Page-3).

Grierson completely agrees with it. (Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. V, Page-411).

Khukhra Pargana of Ranchi District is the region of pure Kudukh languages. As one moves away from this place the impact of neighbouring languages on Kudukh is more in evidence. One form of the Mundari, spoken by the Oraons of the neighbourhood of Ranchi town is called ‘Kera Mundari’ or ‘Horo-liyajagar’. Oraon is influenced by Sadani and Chhatisgarhi towards Barve, Jaspur, Surguja and Udaipur. The glimpse of Bhojpuri and Maghi appears on them in Mirzapur, Palamau and Hazaribagh. There is a deep impact of Sadani in the Biru pargana of Simdega. The Oraons of Bengal are gradually being influenced by the Bengali language. Despite all these, Oraon’s own form is continued. It is a speciality of the Oraons that they speak Sadani fluently. Quite a good number of compositions in Sadani are to be noticed in their songs. “Every Oraon speaks two languages—Kudukh and Nagpuria; Kudukh in his own society and Nagpuria usually with others” are the words of Jagdish Trigunayat, “the good literature of the Oraon tribe is in the Nagpuria language.” (*Oraon Bhasha Aur Sahitya*, Page 8-9).

Literary Development

There has been substantial work done in the field of Kudukh language and literature. Its foundation too was laid by the Christian missionaries and British Officers towards the eve of 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. First of all Rev. Father Batsch presented ‘Brief Grammar and Vocabulary of

Oraon language' in the 35th issue of the Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal (1868). 'An Introduction to the Oraon Language' of Rev. O. Flex and George Campbell was published from Calcutta in 1874. The second work of Rev. Batsch, 'Epitome of the Grammar of Oraon Language' was also published almost at the same time. Hahn's 'Kudukh Grammar' and 'Kudukh-English Dictionary' were published in 1898 and 1900 respectively. A little later Rev. T. Botson's : 'Oraon Dictionary (from A to L)' and in 1924. Rev. A Gringard's 'An Oraon-English Dictionary' and 'A Grammar of the Oraon Language and Study in Oraon Adversaria' came out. 'Kudukh Saiha' of Ahlad Tirki was published in 1949 and in 1956 came out 'An English-Oraon Dictionary' of Rev. C. Bliss. Dr. Michael Tigga's 'Katha Ara Katha Billin Idau' and S.P.P. Bakhala's 'Kudukh Naigas' are other good and appreciable works in this field. 'Kudukh Katha-Billi' of P.C. Becka is a grammar of the same rank published recently.

In the study and publication of Kudukh folk-literature Rev. F. Hahn's, 'Kudukh Folk-lore (1909), and A. Gringard's 'Kudukh Folk-lore' are quite significant. Rev. F. Hahn's, Dharamdes Lakra's and W.G. Archer's 'Leel-kho-Ra-khe-khel' (in two parts) came out in 1941. It is a collection of 2660 Oraon songs of which many songs are in Sadani, which are popular in the Oraons. Bihari Lakra ('Kurukh Dandi'), and Teju Bhagat, Thothe Oraon and Jamua Bhagat ('Chajika Kudukh Dandi') also have made good collections of folk-lore. Archer wrote three books in English on the explanations of the Oraon Songs. These are 'The Blue Grove' (1944), 'The Dove and the Leopard' (1941) and 'Among the Green Leaves'.

The contribution of Julius Tigga is praiseworthy in the collection of Oraon folk-tales. His three books are—'Kudukh Sanni Khiri', 'Kudukh-Katha-Khondha' and 'Kudukh-Katha-Jatra'.

The chief religious books of Christianity in Kudukh is a translation of the Bible (Rev. Urbanus Kujur), few parts of which are still unpublished. 'Kudukh Dandi' and 'Neena Puthi' are the collections of Christian hymns.

In the development of the classical poetic tradition the

contribution of Dawle Kujur is invaluable. His 'Munta Pump Jhumpa' was published in 1950. Some of his songs are still lying unpublished with his wife. In aesthetic beauty, the romantic songs of Dawale Kujur are of the category of Shelley and Keats of English and the Romantic poets of Hindi literature. Besides him Padmashri Juel Lakra, Justin Ekka, Jugia Bhagat, Bihari Lakrai, Haribansh Bhagat, Ayta Oraon, Lohra Oraon, Dr. Francis Ekka, Father P. Ekka, Dr. Nirmal Minz, Edmund Toppo etc. are enriching the prose and poetry of Kudukh.

Presenting the fictional picture of modern life with the name 'Innalanta', Ignes Kujur has given the first novel to Kudukh. Other prose and poetic forms of this language are now coming to light through the medium of All India Radio Ranchi and the magazine, 'Adivasi'. Prof. Inderjeet Oraon has written a mini drama quite recently.

The tradition of Kudukh text books begins from 1937. Samuel Ranka composed a book of Kudukh alphabet that very year. Michael Tigga wrote 'Kudukh Vachna Gahi Munta Puthi', 'Alakhna Ririyarna', 'Paridgarge Angiyana Puthi', 'Rijh Vachna' etc. in 1939. After that, in the year 1948 John Minz prepared a book 'Kudukh Katha Sikhra Age Munta Puthi' and C.K. Toppo wrote 'Bolo Ganit' and 'Lil-Khora Ganit'. The new development of the same tradition is the publication of books for the course of composition of Intermediate and Bachelor classes by Ranchi University, prepared by Kudukh Sahitya Parishad. At present there exists facilities for the teaching of Kudukh at primary, middle and University levels. It is included in the syllabus of the teachers' training courses of Bihar. But actually teaching is limited to only few colleges of Ranchi University.

Magazines like 'Veej Binko', 'Bolta', 'Dhumkuria', 'Kudkhan', 'Parha' etc. have appeared and disappeared at some time or the other.

IV. Conclusion

In the light of the foregoing introduction about the condition of the Jharkhandi languages, I would like to enlist here the problems and the direction towards their further development.

1. Jharkhandi languages, originally, are of three groups-Sadani, Mundari and Kudukh. All the three have a long history and living importance but has remained rather neglected in the more recent period. At present these languages are passing through a phase of re-awakening. In order to facilitate the process, organised research, collection, creative writings and publication in these languages are the need of the day. Those are awaiting for recognition in educational syllabi, from primary classes to the University level. For this, on the one hand is required the formation of a powerful 'Academy' for the Jharkhandi languages, and on the other, to give these places in schools, colleges and government offices.
2. The second important task is to place these in the right perspective of the development of the Jharkhandi nationality. At present these are the languages of different tribes (Kabeela) to a great extent. In the real process of development, the languages of the tribes achieve a height by being the language of a nationality. It may be a difficult question as to what will be the form of the language of the Jharkhandi nationality, which language will be able to assume role of the linguafrance of the whole belt ?

From the angle of pervasiveness, Sadani may have some edge over others to be the language of the nationality of this belt. But, this is only a guess, at present only this much of saying will be proper that the process, which is continuing among these three languages towards forming a standard form in their own inner self, should be encouraged.* In due course, that standard form would be stabilized as it will become free from the external influences and recognize the internal unity of Jharkhandi languages. In this way, by the dialectal process, the language of the nationality of this belt will emerge in distinct and recognisable form in due course of time.

3. The greatest hindrance in the development of the language of the Jharkhand nation is the division of Jharkhandi people

* Such desires are reflected in the Seminars of the Jharkhand Intellectual Forum. vide. *Shalpatra*, 5th issue.

among different provinces. For example, the problems of script and spelling (orthography) become complex owing to this division. In such state of affairs, it is my considered opinion that without the formation of the Jharkhand State even the survival of these languages is impossible. The Jharkhandi nationality will achieve its linguistic identity in the course of the struggle for freedom from their national oppression and class exploitation. The recent activities in the field of language in Jharkhand is a clear indication that their steps have moved in this direction. None can change or check it. The bright future is close at hand.

Agrarian Movement in Dhanbad

R. N. MAHARAJ & K. G. IYER

The attempt in this paper is to focus on one of the contemporary and probably the most important peasant movement in Jharkhand. Jharkhand Mukti Morcha has been actually organising this movement in the Santhal belt of Jharkhand region. The movement was initiated at Dhanbad, and in later period it has spread to the surrounding areas and even to distant regions like Singhbhum or Purnea. However, the focus in this paper will be the formative stage of the movement from the beginning till about 1976, when the activities were confined mostly to Dhanbad. The organisational structure, the programme as well as the quality of leadership of the movement developed during this phase, and hence is the choice of the period.

The Traditional Community Institutions

The nature of the movement has been closely guided by the characteristic social organisation and the history of the Santals. An introduction in these aspects will, therefore, be of much help.

The Santals originally did not live in this part of Bihar. It is difficult to trace their old accounts, but they are settled in and around Hazaribagh district for centuries. Their language

culture, economic and social institutions took a definite shape in this region.

The elders chose their village sites on the basis of some omens considered good. Once the village sites had been selected, the community cleared forests, reclaimed lands, and founded villages, boundaries of which were demarcated. The families which reclaimed lands initially were considered original founders of the village. They appropriated in common the right to cultivate those lands and consume the fruit thereof. The village elders known as *MONREN HOR* (five village functionaries) constituted the repository of authority. They enjoyed some extra rights in land, hunt etc. The accretion of extra rights, however, in no way disrupted the egalitarian character of the community. The land and forest were plinth of the pyramid of the tribal economy. The tribal social institutions at the Village level regulated the right to the use of land and forest. It could be possible through social institutions exercising power with community consensus expressing through commands emanating from village functionaries. The latter had the legitimacy based on consensus. The tribal social institutions were both democratic and all pervasive. They regulated all aspects of life from cradle to the grave. The village chiefs initially inducted into office through informal elections turned out to be holding it on a hereditary basis based on the law of pre-geniture. Such succession, however, is no bar to the replacement of one chief by another in case the latter attracts the community ire. This, however, did not vest them with any special power or privilege. The same was true of other functionaries also, e.g., assistant village chief (Paranik), Censor of Morals (Jog Manjhi), village priests (Naïke), the witch doctor (Sokha), village messenger (Godait) etc. The democratic functioning of the village government was evident from the fact that at the end of the year according to the tribal reckoning all village functionaries voluntarily resigned. At the same time each village household relinquished its right to the use of land allotted to it. Unless there was something wrong the village functionaries were given a fresh mandate. All village lands were redistributed in a manner so as to take care of factor disproportionality. With the advent of so-called private property

rights in land through the induction of British Rule, it has now been rendered more a ritual than anything else. Even then it is reminiscent of the golden age that once characterised the tribal society. There is nothing secretive about the functioning of the village functionaries. The deliberations are always open to everybody having the right to voice his or her grievances. The only village functionary, i.e., *Sokha* (the witch-doctor) functions independently and in a somewhat secretive manner. The village headman is simply *primus inter pares*. He does not enjoy any prerogative or power to permit him to exercise dominant control over the community. To take care of the inter-village disputes and to attain greater community cohesiveness they elected chiefs. The jurisdiction of such inter-village councils, i.e., the institution at the second tier (known as *Parha* or *Patti* among Mundas and *Pargana* among Santals) extended over several villages. Such chiefs were usually the most intelligent and influential among their equals in the area. They were known as *Manki* among Mundas and *Desmanjhi* among Santals. The various functionaries irrespective of their jurisdictions were leaders rather than rulers of men. They were paid for their services in terms of some additional grant of land and occasional gifts as in the case of other village functionaries.

The tribals were bound by community customs, traditions, and consensus. They would take decisions not in camera but in the open. All adult males and females assembled on the occasion had the right to be heard. Custom had overriding sanction and community decisions were easily enforced. They had not produced a Manu or Moses to codify law. Nobody enjoyed any prerogative and no claim could be enforced against the community.

To tackle the problems of the community as a whole and to provide as the third and the last court of appeal, Santals conceived of the institutions of *Lo-Bir-Sendra*. Its meetings were convened once every year. It would coincide with community hunt and animal sacrifice to propitiate malignant spirits. A chief known in local language as *Dihri* would be provisionally elected to preside over deliberations. All the chiefs whether heading one or a group of villages would collect to listen to grievances brought by aggrieved persons. The deliberations

would be so conducted that there would be finally a consensus. While Santals are very strict in regard to the enforcement of sex taboos they ex-communicate and that too when the alleged offender is not amenable to reason. Since *Lo-Bir-Sendra* convened only once a year, there is no permanent chief elected to head it. It is merely an instrument to increase community cohesiveness and to involve it in serious matters relating to it.

The introduction of private property right in land sounded the death knell of peasant proprietorship. There was no room for the recognition of the special rights of the original reclaimers of land and founders of villages or of the village functionaries. It shook the very foundation the tribal institutions and resulted into Santal Rebellion in 1855 particularly in the Santhal Parganas.

While with the introduction of Permanent Settlement, the *Zamindar's* obligation to revenue payment was fixed in perpetuity, no such constraint was imposed on his extortion of rent from tribal peasantry. Even though rent enhancement had to be in proportion to increase in agricultural produce or its price, the *zamindars* merely followed the principle of what the traffic would bear.

In fine, the capacity of *zamindars*, the extortion of *Mahajans*, the corruption of *amlas*, the oppression of the police, the cheating and exactions by traders, the complete absence of justice, and the oppression of Europeans all combined to inflict great sufferings on the Santal peasantry. Santal discontent had reached a boiling point in 1855. They approached the real wielders of power at all levels including the Commissioner. Their entreaties, however, fell on deaf ears. Their patience was exasperated. The village communities started seriously thinking of what action to take. Secret meetings were held under the Santal leadership.

The enlistment of the four brothers, Sidhu, Kanu, Chand and Bhairo, particularly the first to galvanized the Santal mass into action. They could be mobilized through the charisma of Sidhu-Kanu who claimed divine revelation. They were hell bent on the expulsion of the *Dikus* who deprived them of their hearth and home. They did not however, resort to violence. The government unleashed a reign of terror. Apart

from the deployment of military force, police officers *zamindars* and indigo planters were urged to take all steps to suppress the insurrection. The Santals scourged the countryside in small bands. Their movement, however, was so regulated that drum sounds could help the assemblage of 10000 persons sharp. They exhibited very high degree of organization, voluntary discipline, and use of techniques of guerilla fighting without any previous military training.

The government was constrained to declare Martial Law on July 19, 1855. Military deployment was greatly stepped up with instructions to destroy all armed santals. Handsome rewards ranging from Rs. 1000/- to Rs. 10000/- were offered for the apprehension of leaders of various categories. Even in the face of such brutal repression the insurrection spread to Godda, Pakur, Maheshpur, Murshidabad, and Birbhum. The rebels enlisted the support of large number of non-tribal poor and retaliated with an unheard of fury. The army operated in a savage manner and on a single day i.e. July 29, 1855 razed to the ground thirty six santal villages.

Even in the face of such savage repression the santals did not loose their hearts. They faced their enemies like granite rocks displaying most reckless courage. By the middle of August 1855 the number of santal insurgent rose to 30000. The troop size engaged against them ran into tens of thousands. According to an estimate given by Balfour fifteen to twenty five thousand santals were killed. Many leaders including Kanu were executed. Many santals were taken prisoners, tried in haste and sentenced to severe punishment. The commissioner of Santal Parganas in one single instance tried 253 santals. Among them there were forty six boys whose age ranged from nine to ten years. A substantial number of the prisoners were sentenced to rigorous imprisonment ranging from seven to fourteen years.

After the suppression of insurrection government was constrained to initiate measures to protect the santals from the extortion of the *mahajans*, the corruption of *amlas*, and the oppression of the police to prevent the outbreak of any such insurrection in future. A special system of administration was

introduced. The area inhabited by santals was separated from the districts of Bhagalpur and Birbhum and formed into a separate district of Santal Parganas. The district was removed from the operation of the general laws and regulations. The chief village functionaries were vested with police powers. The main features of this non-regulation system were : (1) to have no intermediary between the santal and the Assistant Commissioner ; (2) to lodge complaints verbally ; (3) to conduct all criminal work with the help of Santals who were to bring in the accused with the witnesses to the courts.

Tundi : The Theatre of the Current Movement

Tundi is a development block of Dhanbad adjacent to Santhal Parganas. It is 35 Kms. north of the districts headquarters on the Dhanbad-Giridih road. It has an area of 152 sq. miles. The number of villages in Tundi is 296. It is an undulating terrain interspersed with hills and forests but with no mineral resources. The hill range extends upto Parasnath making a natural ecological division into East and West Tundi. The landscape in the western region is more undulating than in the eastern one. It accounts for 80 per cent of the forest resources of the district. Unlike Jharia, Katras, Nirsa, Jodapokhar, Kendwadih, Chas, etc., where bulk of the coal-mines and industries are concentrated, Tundi continues to be exclusively rural. Tribals almost entirely santals constitute nearly 49 per cent of the population in the area followed by scheduled castes whose population as percentage of total population is 10.4 (1971 census). Bereft of coal and other mineral resources, Tundi was subjected to a different kind of exploitation than in the industrial zone. The intrusion of aliens—Hindus and Muslims from other parts of Bihar and Bengal—did serious damage to the idyllic character of Santal Society as a consequence of the introduction of trade and money-lending. The creation of the institution of *Zamindars* intensified the magnitude of the exploitation of the local population. It also gave a big fillip to immigration of aliens. The *zamindars*, moneylenders, traders and labour recruiters exploited Tundi Santals in the same way as their brethren elsewhere in the rural pockets of the districts

(like Govindpur, Baghmara, Baliapur, Chandankiari). The Tundi *Zamindar* and his *Dewan* severely encroached upon customary rights to forest which resulted in manifest discontent of Santals from 52 villages in 1869. The *zamindar* was forced to run away to Katras. Col. Dalton, the then Commissioner, had to intervene and secure the restoration of their encroached rights to forest. The measure, however, proved no deterrent to the exploitative proclivities of the ruling triumvirate—*zamindars*, moneylenders and traders. The first engaged in rack-renting and realization of exorbitant illegal imposts. He evicted tenants arbitrarily to facilitate enhancement of rent and realization of exorbitant sum as *Salami* from the new tenants. The other two exploited santals in their usual ways. The intrusion of aliens *qua* traders, moneylenders, and landlords wrought havoc in the tribal economy. (Trade and moneylending to be precise were initially inseparable and only at a later date differentiation emerged). The traders forced tribals to engage into unequal exchange of an order that destroyed the nexus between effort and reward. They were primarily interested in keeping tribals under their thumb to exercise absolute control over the disposal of their labour and the appropriation of the fruit thereof. Experience revealed the control over income-stream was contingent upon the control over income yielding asset. It could be possible through recourse to usury. The moneylenders would appropriate the lion's share of the slice of the tribals income. Recalcitrance would be met with forcible harvesting of paddy. (Agriculture in Dhanbad is characterised by monoculture). They would divest tribals not merely of their livestock but also of such trivial things as silver or brass ornaments and culinary utensils. The tribals were thoroughly pauperized. They would be forced to lose their land either through mortgage or outright sale through dubious means. The erstwhile peasant proprietors would suddenly find themselves reduced to the status of sharecroppers or agricultural labourers. It did not, however, mean the extrication from exploiters' stranglehold. Owing to the enforcement of the so-called law of Contract. (The law does not take into account the relative bargaining positions or differences in the capacity to resist of the contracting parties. The myth that all

are equal in the eyes of law and enter voluntarily into contracts to advance their self-interests only puts a veneer round the exploiters' fangs), they were reduced to the status of what Marx calls 'instrumentum vocale', on the exploiters' farms. The spurt to industrialization and mining activities led to large-scale deforestation and consequent contraction of income building asset base of the tribal economy. Such large-scale economic exploitation of tribals also coincided with social and cultural exploitation. Drinking was no longer on occasion for conviviality. It degenerated into drunkenness which not merely filled the state and liquor contractors coffers but also offered a convenient tool to the moneylenders and others of their ilk. It also increased the incidence of horizontal violence, thus weakening the family and community ties. The rapacity of exploiters also infected village functionaries who fared no better than watchdogs to protect the interest of enemies of the tribals. Social occasions necessitating performance of certain rituals (birth, marriages, death and festivals) and the invitation of the community to sharing of food and drink, was alright within the context of an autarkic economy. In the changed context in which the lambs were huddled together with lions and with the jungle law in free operation, it was no wonder that the lambs started getting progressively decimated. The exploiters used tribals' propensity to promiscuous hospitality (limited to a particular tribe only) on social occasions to force them into indebtedness only to strengthen their octopus-like hold over the poor wretches' land and labour. Our shylocks, however, outwitted their Shakespearean counterpart. Their interest extended beyond economics. They violated tribal sense of communal pride and morality. While such incidents engendered sporadic violence, they were no dress-rehearsals for the outbreak of a movement even remotely comparable with the Kol *ulgulan* (rebellion) of 1833 or the Santal *Hul* (revolution) of 1855. In Santal Parganas the influx of santals, reclamation of land and their subjection to savage exploitation at the hands of immigrant *Dikus* and venal officers were very quick. The result was the great *Hul*. In Tundi where tribals had been living since time immemorial the process of land reclamation and consequent alienation at the hands of immigrants were gradual. The result was that the

Santal economy and society could absorb the shock (except once in 1869-70 as referred to earlier). The great santal *Hul* resulted in drastic steps to curb exploitation, restore lands and the passage of protective tenancy legislation. The government was constrained to give official recognition to the village headman and vest them with powers of magistrate, police, and revenue collectors. All these measures strengthened the santal social institutions and their solidarity but their impact was to be kept confined only to the areas affected by the insurrection. The *Hul* as such had no impact on the life of santals in Tundi. It was the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act, 1908 which provided some modicum of protection. Even this one was introduced in Dhanbad as late as 1920. The Act, however, was administered both during pre and post independence period in a manner that led to large-scale alienation of santal lands in Tundi.

Several studies reveal the conditions of santals in Tundi before the movement led by Jharkhand Mukti Morcha. A study conducted by Gupta on behalf of Bihar Tribal Research Institute, Ranchi found that two thirds of santals were landless. Indebtedness was of a very high magnitude. The rate of interest varied from 150 to 600 per cent. This was accompanied by massive land alienation. The *Dikus* took to varying ways of alienation of land e.g. *Bhugut Bandhak*, *Sud Bandhak*, Collusive Title Suits, etc. He found that 90 acres of tribal lands were alienated in 1963 alone through 145 collusive title suits in the whole of the district. In the villages surveyed on 200 santal households it was revealed that 13.77 acres were alienated through mortgage for loans ranging from Rs. 50/- to 500/-. Similarly, we found in our earlier survey conducted in 1969-70 that almost all the santal households in the two Tundi villages were indebted. Land alienation in Tundi had taken a colossal proportion. Even at an approximate average of 15 acres land alienation in a tribal village in Tundi the extent of losses of tribal lands in the entire Tundi Block comes to more than 1500 acres. Moneylenders as such were not interested in land but the produce of it. Through recourse to usury they siphoned off the major produce from the santal lands by reducing them to the status of share-croppers. The primary interest of moneylenders and traders as it was evident from the result of our surveys

ducted in 1969-71 and in 1975-76 is really the extension of control over land and labour. None of them had invested the amount in strengthening the technical base of agriculture or in the application of modern inputs and seeds. Bulk of the santals were reduced to the status of a *Kamia* (bonded labour).

The progressive deterioration in the economic condition of tribals, the disintegration of their social institution, the corruption of their morals, and the failure of tribal political organizations and leadership to respond to challenges of the time only exasperated tribal patience leading to a large-scale eruption of violence in several places in Chotanagpur including Tundi. However, they proved no match to their exploiters machinations who just used their money power to frustrate tribal endeavour to get justice. The government policy in this regard was one of stick and carrot. It made use of its coercive apparatus to silence tribals into submission but at the same time it was accompanied with a drastic amendment of the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act of 1908 in 1969. The amendment stipulated the restoration of all lands alienated from the tribals through the circumvention of the protective clauses of the Act and exercise of greater concern and authority by the Deputy Commissioner over land transactions involving tribals as vendors.

In the scheduled areas land so alienated within the last 30 years and in the non-scheduled ones during last 12 years preceding the amendment of the Act were to be restored without compensation to vendees. The restoration of land alienated within twelve years hardly makes a dent into the problem. The Dhebar Commission and the two successive Deputy Commissioners, Messers K.B. Saxena and Lakshman Shukla urged strongly upon government to declare Tundi a scheduled area. The alienation of land in the Municipal area or land meant for so-called non-agricultural purpose (*Chaparbandi*) even in the rural areas was exempt from the purview of the amendment. The amendment was not followed by consequent change in the attitude of administration. There was no attempt again either on the part of government or voluntary institutions including political parties to raise the level of the political consciousness of the tribals and to involve them into a well thought out plan of collective venture to secure justice. The amendment as such

proved to be an eddict writ on water. Several tribals made individual attempts as revealed through the file of the Deputy Commissioner, Land Reforms, Dhanbad to benefit from the amendment but there was hardly any success. Even the intervention of tribal youths and social workers who scoured the countryside to detect cases of land alienation to impress upon administration the fact of the magnitude of the problem bore hardly and fruit. The latest amendment as it is evident from the preceding comments had hardly brought any change in the attitude of the administration towards tribal welfare. A pithy description of their attitude and consequent action following from it could be described in the oft-quoted phrase. "Heads you lose tails I win". The restoration of land was a difficult but not an impossible task. What stood in the way were: (a) lacunae in the act which instead of making a distinction between tribal and non-tribal made one between scheduled and non-scheduled areas (b) most of the moneylenders had tribal land registered in Purulia. Since no such registration could take place in Dhanbad, the State Government took no step to stop it. Till 1969 mutation was possible. Even after that time the moneylenders continued to be in *defacto* possession of land. Had the Government deputed a minor clerk to get an account of all such registration from Purulia and conducted on the spot study to find out the true state of affairs, i.e. in whose possession the land was, the tribals would have greatly benefitted. Instead it continued to adopt the ostrich like attitude, the venality of Revenue Department officials and the so-called impartiality of lawyers who would defend any case for a fee also militated against tribal interest.

The consequence of state indifference to initiate action for restoration of tribal lands was recourse to forcible harvesting of paddy. According to the police records (1971), such incidence occurred in sixteen villages of Tundi. In the village of Ukma it occurred thrice. In all cases tribals gathered in large numbers and harvested paddy. All operations were carried on in the broad day light from fields which had once been theirs. They were not at all bothered by the constraints imposed by 1969 amendment or by the law of limitation. Their *modus operandi* was as follows: Tribals numbering from 100 to 1000 irrespective

of their age or sex would march to fields from which they planned to harvest paddy. They would be armed with indigenous weapons, bows, arrows and axes. Their war drums would be constantly beating. The drum sounds would cause terrible alarm among the *Dikus*. Initially some of them having fire-arms tried to scare away tribal harvesters. It did not, however, prove even a mild deterrent. One of them in a Tundi village had his gun seized by the tribals. Another landlord-cum-moneylender in a Chas village could retrieve part of the crop through liberal use of firearms and musclemen. The next step was to seek police support. The police even when informed in advance would hardly take preemptive actions. They could, however, institute cases and issue non-bailable warrants. Such measures could not be effective. Recourse had as such to be taken to distress warrants. It did not again deliver wanted tribals into the hands of the minions of law since most of them were hardly in possession of movables. Police were ultimately forced to put pressure on tribal elites (e.g. tribal officials, school teachers, clerks, etc.) to nab the wanted persons. Easily convinced of the bonafides of quislings masquerading as their brethren ninetyseven of them surrendered voluntarily. They were put behind bars. In some cases before being sent to jails they were beaten by the police at the instigation of moneylenders. Those arrested were released after several months of confinement. Forcible harvesting inspite of administrative and police repression did not come to an end. It continued to be recurrent phenomenon characterizing the agrarian scene. The initial attitude of the administration and the local press was, however, one of extreme hostility. The Kurmis of the Shivaji Samaj alongwith tribals were also struggling for the restoration of their land. They were subjected to severe repression resulting in several deaths. The mere sight of a jeep would force the whole village to run into their forest hideouts. The parasites, their muscle, and venal government officials would carry away tribal belongings, including chicks and goats. In many cases even the whole hamlets was set on fire. The so-called elites among tribals were threatened with dire consequences in

case they made common cause with their community. The hiatus between the administration and the tribals reached a breaking point. The gains from such spontaneous acts were merely limited set largely by losses sustained as a result of their implications in criminal cases and loss of movables. Nothing beyond this happened for the reason that there was no leadership for transforming the spontaneity into organization and imbue the movement with short-term and long-term goals.

Emergence of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha

The agrarian unrest in Dhanbad attracted the attention of a section of militant trade unionists operating in the colliery sector led by A.K. Roy. These trade unionists were not of a tribe who followed the beaten track. They accorded priority to scheduled caste and tribal miners in their fight against injustice meted out to colliery workers. They were, however, deeply conscious of the fact that the mine workers would not succeed in their objectives unless they coordinated their activities with the working peasantry in the hinterland which consisted overwhelmingly of the economically and socially underprivileged strata. They as such strove to involve each in the struggle of the other. It could, however, be possible only in areas with the close proximity of mines. They acutely felt that such limited coverage would render their activities vis-a-vis their objectives into a wild goose chase. There was urgent need to fan out into the interior. It could be possible only through the instrumentality of an organization. The various political parties working in the district were of no avail in their respect. Trade unions again had no resources, material as well as human. The natural corollary following from it was that the under-privileged sections of the population must throw up their own leadership. The end-product, however, was the inauguration of the *Jharkhand Mukti Morcha* towards the end of 1972. It sought to transform spontaneity into the organization and channelize unleashed mass energy into the attainment of short-term and long-term objectives. It would struggle against all usurers rentiers, and land-grabbers. It would not merely seek to restore land to the tribals but also initiate steps to dynamize the rural economy. Waste lands would be reclaimed. The

local water resources would be tapped to provide irrigation. Such step would ensure extension of area under crops and multiple cropping. Gross cropped area could thus increase. Tribal peasants would take to high yielding variety seeds and chemical fertilizer. Local resources would also be tapped to provide for increasing quantity of organic manure. Live-stock farming would be given a big boost. The stress on economic uplift of tribals would be matched with similar stress on their social and cultural advancement. Wasteful expense on social and religious occasions would be reduced to the minimum. Metropolis would not be allowed to drain out such staple products as would enter the consumption basket of the poor. Total prohibition would be introduced in the area. All these measures would not merely lead to the social and cultural uplift of tribals but also drastic reduction in wasteful expenditure and as a consequence augmentation of their income. Since all these measures may not be able to transform the perpetually deficit households into self-sufficient ones, it was stipulated that each village would have grain-bank. The new institution would not merely render moneylenders dysfunctional but would also foster saving habits in various activities and act as treasurer to the *Morcha*. Village disputes would be settled in the village itself to avoid litigation expenses and to foster horizontal solidarity. It was also envisaged that each village would run a night school to promote literacy among children as well as adults. The medium of instruction would be the mother tongue as a device to foster cultural regeneration. The status of women would be elevated through ban on child marriage, polygamy, wife-beating and indiscriminate divorce. They would be imparted with special skills in sewing and knitting. Community centres would provide recreational facilities. Competitions would be organised to reward those with outstanding talents in the use of indigenous weapons. Movement would ultimately aim at the creation of an autonomous state of *Jharkhand* comprising parts of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, and West Bengal. No xenophobia would be allowed to enter into the definition of a *Jharkhandi*. He or she would be a producer irrespective of caste, tribe or religion. It would be possible only through the gradual transformation of the tribal movement into a mass

movement of working peasantry to be linked with the similar movement of workers. In the hinterland of Dhanbad the trade union leaders found that along with the tribals, detribalised Kurmi peasants led by Binod Bihar Mahato were also struggling, not merely for economic uplift but also for social reforms. Effort was made successfully to forge a link between the two movements. For the long-term interest of the movement it was considered necessary to help tribals to throw up their own leadership. It was at this stage that Sibū Soren caught their attention. Sibū's father had been a school teacher and a man of high personal integrity. He thoroughly detested moneylenders' wiley ways and opposed them. For this he had to pay with his life. His murderers had eluded justice. The moneylenders were not satisfied with this. They sowed seeds of dissensions in Sibū's family which ultimately resulted in partition. Sibū while reading at school (Class X) was left to fend for himself. He had to discontinue his studies and take to farming. Sometimes he was forced to work as agricultural labourer also. All his trials and tribulations only tended to harden his attitude towards moneylenders and others of their ilk. He was firmly resolved to avenge his father's death. Unlike the tribal leaders of the nineteenth century, he could clearly see that the physical liquidation of moneylenders would not secure the end. He must fight for the creation of a new society whose social milieu would have no room for parasites. While he could realise the immensity of the task, no single individual whatever qualities of head and heart he might possess on his own, would usher in such a society. Only the mass effort (the definition of mass not being restrictive to tribals) could be the midwife for such a society. It led Sibū to think over the quality of men and women who would be the harbingers of the new society. And this exercise saddened his heart. The santals whom he liked to draw initially into the fold first had degenerated both as individuals and community even though they were engaged in forcible harvesting of paddy from lands alienated from them. They passively suffered miseries inflicted by exploiters. They did not resist the seizure of their crops, livestock and land. Their blood did not boil even when their wives and daughters were ravished by village sharks and venal public functionaries.

All they did was to drown their sorrow in the cesspool of alcohol as a means of temporary escape from the ugly reality. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha functioned in an unconventional sense, i.e. the organization of peasants though linked with that of workers was subordinate to no party. It rather cared a fig for party labels. It was only concerned with the attitude of the organized groups towards exploited working masses. It sought to bring about a kind of conjunction between the long-term and the short-term programme in a manner that would conform to the adage—only new men make new societies. The organization as such had to act as a crucible in which all dress would be burnt. In consonance with the objectives outlined earlier, the *Morcha* did not cry a halt to the forcible harvesting. It only intensified the massiveness of participation and coverage. With traditional leaders not being deprived of their customary privileges they could be persuaded to take an active interest in the activities of the *Morcha*. Spontaneity no longer remained a fact. The various organs of the *Morcha* which will be described later, conducted enquires to detect such lands and then take a collective decision to harvest paddy from the field that 'legally' belonged to the tribals.

Forcible Harvesting

The massive and organized effort of forcible harvesting by the *Morcha* was initiated in 1972 and continued till 1975. Initially Tundi was the theatre of the movement which later spread to other rural areas in the Dhanbad District. It, however, did not confine to this district alone but also enveloped the tribal areas in the neighbouring districts of Giridih and Santal Parganas. We shall here first outline briefly the nature of mobilization in Tundi and other rural areas of the district and later its extension to the districts of Giridih and Santal Parganas.

In Tundi in 1972 their initial strategy was to concentrate on villages where big sharks lived. Mass mobilization outmatched resistance. The first target of attack was Rajo Mian of village Jatakhuti who had alienated more than 100 acres of land belonging to Santals from several villages. The *Morcha* mobilized

tribals not only from villages of Tundi but also from the neighbouring tribal villages of Pirtanr block (in the district of Giridih). The operation was a total success. The success in the village of Jatakhuti provided motivation to the *Morcha* to chose two other villages of Tundi i. e. Maniadih and Pokharia, which were the citadel of the landlords and moneylenders who belonged to the castes of Bhumihars, Mairas, Banias and Mandals. The *Dikus* of these two villages had grabbed several hundred acres of tribal land in many villages. In the village of Pokharia the tribals could collectively harvest paddy from 50 acres of land. The village of Maniadih, however, turned out to be a hard nut to crack. The *Dikus* here fired at tribal harvesters who in turn replied with their arrows. It was enough for the *Dikus* to take to their heels. In 1973 tribals harvested paddy in more than 20 villages. There were no armed clashes except in village Karmatanr. Here while they were engaged in harvesting paddy from 15 acres of land alienated by five moneylenders, the *Dikus*, 4000 strong, collected and some among them resorted to firing. Tribals, less than hundred, faced them with their bows and arrows boldly and forced the *Dikus* to run away from the scene. They later successfully harvested the paddy. In 1974 the scene of forcible harvesting had shifted from Tundi except in one village Durgadih on 5th March, 1974, where several hundred tribals took a procession to plant red and green flag in the land of Lakhi Ram Murmu (measuring 1.26 acres) which was alienated by one Kunwar Singh Chowdhury. The *Dikus* fired at them in which one adivasi adult and a child died. It resulted in the arrest of 35 non-tribals and the seizure of gun of a moneylender.

The activities in Tundi had their reverberations in the blocks of Govindpur, Baliapur and Topchanchi of Dhanbad Districts. Village of Pargha in Baliapur Block was a very complex case both in terms of participation and resistance. Apart from tribals there was involvement of non-tribals belonging to Mandal, Kurmi and Scheduled castes. Here there was also intimate linkage of worker-peasant alliance. Workers in nearby coal-mines and Sindri factory joined the peasants. On several occasions earlier, the tribal peasants had helped the cause of the workers.

They joined them in procession to Sindri demanding higher wages for workers and to coal mines to demand reinstatement of retrenched workers.

In January 1974, the tribals had harvested crops from the land alienated by *Mukhia* (village Panchayat headman) in Topchanchi Block. The next day on his persuasion, the officer-in-charge of Topchanchi police station accompanied with two constables went to the village to arrest the tribals allegedly involved in forcible harvesting. The tribals apprehended something foul as the previous day the police had imprisoned three tribals. They beat their war drum. Large number of tribals collected. While the constables ran away, the officer-in-charge could not escape as he was a little aged. Since then the Sub-Inspector of police was traceless. Subsequently the whole area was combed with hundreds of armed policemen but the police officer could not be traced.

The tribal areas of Giridih district particularly the Pirtanr and Gandey blocks were the fierce scene of forcible harvesting in 1973 and 1974 accompanied with clashes and violence.

In 1973 the forcible harvesting (Dhan Katti Andolan) had caught deep roots in the tribal pockets of Giridih district particularly in Pirtanr, Gandey, Giridih *Mufassil* (areas adjoining Giridih) and Dumri. Tribals, 6000 strong, demonstrated before Deputy Commissioner, Giridih on the 23rd October 1973 to restore bulk of land alienated from tribals which had reached colossal proportion. The situation in other tribal villages of the district was no less shocking. Again, towards the end of December 1973 the tribals 6000 strong, took out a demonstration before S.D.O., Giridih, led by A.K. Roy demanding the release of Binod Bihari Mahto. Tribals in huge number also demonstrated before B.D.O., Dumri asking him to restore alienated lands. The unsympathetic administration which considered it as a law and order problem without understanding its socio-economic roots had arrested over 400 tribals by December 1973.

Around the middle of November 1974, in village Kurkutanr of Pirtanr block, the Bengali moneylenders opened fire on Ghatwars (a backward caste community) and tribals who were

harvesting crops from a field alienated by the *Dikus*. One Ghatwar died. The next day tribals and Ghatwars 2000 strong, chased a truck which was carrying the dead body to Barakar river. They seized both the truck and the dead body. One special feature was the active involvement of non-tribals poor like Ghatwars, Kurmis, and Harijans with the tribals in forcible harvesting. The militancy was at high pitch. A local daily reported that adivasis took away all paddy surrendered in spite of magistrate's decision.

Indian Nation (an English daily from Patna) reports that maximum land trouble in the year 1974 had taken place in Giridih district. According to its reporting 1.25 lakh mounds of paddy were harvested from Pirtanr block alone spread to more than 5000 acres. In the villages of Dumri, Giridih Mufassil and Nawadih the harvesting during the same period was 40000, 60000, and 4500 mounds of paddy respectively. During this period more than 50 tribals were arrested. The pressure exerted by the rural poor led the administration to hold mobile courts to restore tribal lands alienated within 12 years (as per the existing provision of Chotanagpur Tenancy Act) but it could hardly satisfy the tribal aspirations. They demanded similar benefits to which the tribal brethren were entitled to in the scheduled areas of Chotanagpur i.e. the restoration of lands alienated within the last 30 years.

Santal Pargannas also became an intense field of tribal activity in 1974. Forcible harvesting had spread to several areas. According to a Searchlight report more than 50000 Mds. of paddy had been harvested in several villages of Sarath, Narayanpur, Karan, Madhupur, and Palojori P.S. However, there were three incidents resulting in armed clashes. The first one was in village Narayanpur, P.S. Sarath where a tribal, Johan Soren was harvesting paddy along with his family members on 12th November, 1974 in the field alienated by a *Diku*. The moneylender opened fire and the tribal died on the spot. This enraged Santals and in two days, i.e. on the 14th November 1974, more than 20000 Santals collected from Giridih, Santal Parganas and Dhanbad to the village and consoled the bereaved family. They took out a big procession from the village to

their *Chetan Baisi* headquarter at Taledih. Sibu Soren addressed the gathering in which he warned the exploiters with dire consequences. *Dikus* were stunned to see the santal solidarity.

This was just the beginning of the mobilization of santals in Santals Parganas. Two more serious incidents followed in quick succession. *Dikus* were thick skinned and they would not learn from the exhibition of santal solidarity. In early December 1974, santals near Karmatanr village asked several moneylenders and traders to appear before their *Baisi* to explain why they constructed houses in santal lands. The moneylenders did not appear. Rather two days later they assaulted two saantals in Karmatanr Bazar. This infuriated santals and they discussed it in *Chetan Baisi* at Taledih. As a result of this decision, more than ten thousand santals were mobilized from Giridih, Dhanbad, and Santal Parganas three days following the incident. They took out a huge procession through the Bazar, conveyed to the authorities their resentment against the high-handedness of *Dikus* and dispersed after holding a meeting. This solidarity among santals sent shivers through the spines of of *Dikus*. The next incident took place in village Kurva of Narayanpur P.S. where eight to ten tribals were involved in harvesting crops from the land alienated by a moneylender. The *Dikus* with their musclemen and hirelings 300 strong, assaulted and opened fire at them. Two tribals died on the spot. The exploiters also concealed the dead bodies. By next day several thousand santals gathered and gave ultimatum to authorities to hand over the dead bodies to them within five days. The police after intensive search could discover the dead body on the fifth day which was hidden in a local tank. Then they constructed a memorial for the martyrs in the village. The result was that the sweep of the movement was so wide and participation so massive that it was physically beyond the capacity of the police to maintain the *status quo*. Firing could hardly have been a deterrent since the tribals were so many and so stubborn that the police had to kill all or a very large number. The panic among landgrabbers reached a climax. The local press started publishing gory details of the so-called crimes perpetrated by tribal and Kurmi peasants. The district

administration turned out to be extremely hostile. It used its coercive apparatus to force struggling peasantry into submission. Many were put behind bars. The use of force in the face of massive participation could not prove very effective.

The tribals had also made a common cause with non-agricultural labourers. During the first week of January 1974, nearly 1500 tribals associated themselves with the struggle of the workers of Bera (North-West Gonwari) colliery leading to the institution of cases against 150. Again, on the 1st February 1975, when some henchmen of the management of Khaskuian colliery attacked labourers, several hundred tribal peasants from the neighbouring villages resisted. Again, in the same year anti-social elements in the pay of management, fired at the Sijua colliery workers. The tribal peasants in the vicinity also fought side by side with workers. The victims were both workers and peasants. The tribals also gave shelter to the workers in the surrounding villages. Similarly between 1974 and 1975 the workers of Bera colliery jointly participated in the forcible harvesting operation in the village of Pargha (P.S. Baliapur) along with tribal, Kurmi and Harijans peasants. The peasants also joined the workers of colliery and Sindri factory in staging massive demonstration of reinstatement of retrenched workers, and their better wages and working conditions. On 23rd February 1975 tribals around Gomoh went to the assistance of struggling railway workers. The joint participation and strength of workers and peasants was demonstrated in the Annual Meet of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha on the 4th February every year from 1973 to 1976 when lakhs of them with red and green flags attended it.

The tribal movement to secure lost lands, repudiate debts, and get back pledged articles reached its climax with the end of 1974 and beginning of 1975. While the movement had engulfed Dhanbad, Giridih, and Santals Parganas districts, its impact over the entire area was not uniform. It can be explained in terms of differences in the organized strength of tribal peasants and the vested interests, the attitude and involvement of the local political elites but more importantly in terms of that of the district administration. In Tundi the organized

strength of the tribals had a decisive edge over that of the vested interests. The attitude and involvement of local political elites proved largely inconsequential in the face of the promptness with which the new Deputy, Commissioner, Mr. K. B. Saxena who joined in August 1974 in Dhanbad, handled the situation. He viewed the tribal unrest as the consequence of their 'age-long exploitation at the hands of moneylenders, land-grabbers etc. He sought to treat the disease rather than the symptoms. He adopted an entirely new policy of bridging the chasm between the tribal and the administration.

At great personal risk he met the tribal leader unarmed. A large number of tribals collected. He listened to their grievances and assured them that the administration would spare no pains to redress them within the limits of law. While the earlier movement veered round the 1969 Amendment to Chotanagpur Tenancy Act, the promulgation of the Debt Redemption Ordinance added a new dimension to it. Saxena had its provisions translated into Hindi and Santali and gave them wide publicity particularly in Tundi. The Ordinance at once widened the scope of the restoration of land (in addition to restoration of pledged moveable articles) in the sense that mortgages lost their legal validity. Saxena did not curb tribal initiative to harvest paddy from the fields illegally alienated from them through chicanery or force. He posted Central Reserve Police and magistrates at strategic points to ensure peaceful harvesting. In case, a non-tribal landholder felt aggrieved he could immediately seek the magisterial intervention to get wrongs righted. Again, in the face of Debt Redemption Ordinance, tribals started pressing their claims against moneylenders in a big way. In some instances they seized the initiative and settled scores with the moneylenders. As a preemptive measure to avoid clashes between the contending parties he constituted tripartite bodies-representatives of moneylenders, tribals and officials under the chairmanship of magistrates. These Committees were mobile and could visit various villages and settled disputes amicably. Besides, the administration on its own initiated measures to restore land to the tribals. In addition to the restoration of land and pledged movables

and immovables the tribals were also granted credit to procure chemical fertilizer and high yielding variety seeds. Since the *Morcha* was very much there, there was no leakage of any amount of productive loans into non-productive ones. The end product of all these measures was a significant fall in the incidence of forcible harvesting.

In Giridih, tribals forcibly harvested paddy on a significant scale in 1973. The administration responded by launching drive for land restoration. The general expectation was that cases of forcible harvesting would not recur in face of the palliatives. However, it could achieve nothing. There was a several-fold increase in cases of forcible harvesting during the 1974-75 harvest period. It was also marked by very violent clashes with casualties on both sides. In one instance a sub-inspector of police was killed, In another instance a Choukidar was killed. The villages of Kudko and Ahilyapur-Deopur were the scenes of worst occurrences. There was a massive deployment of Central Reserve Police and indiscriminate arrest of tribals including some moneylender. Such unfortunate turn of events took place because the intelligence system of administration was faulty. Tribals were not an organised lot. Moneylenders and their ilk possessed superior fire-power and finally the administration bungled with the whole situation handling it with neither tact nor sympathy.

In Santal Parganas the situation was no better. Here again, many lives were lost. Violent incidents spilled over in 1975 as well. One factor that complicated the issue very much was the attitude of some organised political forces fighting for the protection of the rights of moneylenders and other landgrabbers. The latter made extensive use of their firearms which the former replied with arrows.

Dynamizing Tribal Economy and Society in Tundi

While santal peasants with their other compatriots were struggling in parts of the three districts against the exploitation of moneylenders, traders, landlords, etc. those in Tundi were massively engaged in dynamizing the rural economy and in their social and cultural regeneration. They could do so partly

because they faced a rather friendly district administration but largely because Jharkhand Mukti Morcha was better organised there than elsewhere. Its dedicated cadres described euphemistically as volunteers were inextricably linked with the socio-cultural institutional matrix of santal life. The restoration of land to the original owners alienated even beyond the period stipulated in the 1969 amendment did not square adequately with tribal need for land. Besides, the Dhanbad agricultural land, by and large, unlike the alluvial soil, is infertile. The undulating nature of the topography greatly reduces its moisture retention capacity and is ill-suited to the requirements of providing land with assured irrigation facility. Even after the end of exploitation, monoculture continued to characterize the situation. The continued adverse land-man ratio and poor technical base of the agriculture combined with the use of the traditional seeds, implements, and techniques of farming tended to decrease agricultural productivity. There was urgent need for some colossal measures both to farm lands as they existed and to dynamize economy. In the post-struggle phase, most of the santal peasants found themselves in a quandry. All of them did not have material resources including draft-power to bring areas under cultivation. To overcome the factor disproportion they took to farming on a collective rather than individual basis. They pooled all their human and material resources together and finished agricultural operations. Since intra-tribal inequality in the pattern of land distribution was not very high the consequent appropriation of produce in proportion to areas owned did not accelerate the process of social stratification. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, however, also introduced built-in devices to correct this anomaly should it arise on a significant basis. It mobilized tribal peasants to engage collectively in the reclamation of waste land, the conversion of uplands into low lands and the exploitation of available ground water resources to increase the area under irrigation. Cultivation is mostly confined to low (Kanali) and not so low (Behali) lands. Uplands (Tanr) are hardly cultivable. It is not that the fields cannot be levelled and provided with irrigation facilities. All that is required is massive investment. The State, however, is not inclined to undertake any such measure for the simple reason

that the non-agricultural population in Dhanbad does not depend on the hinterland for the supply of agricultural or livestock produce. The *Morcha* mobilized people to renovate tanks and dam hillstreams and rivers. The water from these sources was used to grow summer-rice, wheat and vegetables. These activities were, however, carried on during agricultural seasons thus entailing no additional requirement of money or wage-goods. It improved the land-man ratio, led to diversification of cropping pattern and increased crop intensity. Wheat was more than an exotic crop in Dhanbad. In the absence of irrigation facilities the introduction of wheat and other summer crops would have been a foolhardy endeavour. The tribal peasants practised mono culture. They did not know how to grow summer rice, wheat and vegetables. They had always been relying on traditional seeds obtained as loan from moneylenders. The *Morcha* tried to introduce the use of high-yielding variety seeds. It also stressed the need for maximum use of organic manure and of chemical fertilizer. It enlisted the support of non-tribal *Krishi Pandit* (agricultural expert). He volunteered to work with tribals on their fields acquainting them through demonstration with intricacies involved in the cultivation of new crops and the use of inputs. While the productivity of individual tribal landholders increased through common pooling of resources and collective participation, they also undertook to other ways of collective farming. The lands restored by tribals alienated beyond 12 years by moneylenders were entrusted to protective care of village *baisties* as individual tribals would not be able to save their lands through involvement in litigation procedures. The Jharkhand Mukti *Morcha* got such lands cultivated through collective participation of tribals in the village. 50% of such produce went to the tribal landowners, 25% to those contributing labour, and rest 25% deposited in the grain bank for developmental effort of the community. By 1975 beginning we could find five villages already engaged in such collective farming covering 125 acres of land.

The traditional tribal peasants took easily to it. The new agricultural practices increased yields. Their liberation from the fetters of moneylenders (and other related measures which

we will discuss later), brought about a significant change in their living conditions. They, however, did not stop here. They sought to give a big boost to their livestock (including poultry farming) through their collective efforts. They built large farm houses in over ten villages. They had plans to borrow a pig, or a goat, a chick from all those households who had any of them. Such animals and birds were to be reared in the collective livestock farms. The lenders would get back what was due to them and the farms would finally emerge as fully owned by the community. Such ventures could not merely generate employment, offer opportunities for improvement in the breed of poultry and livestock but would also fill community coffers. The linkage with the urban market could be so established as to eliminate any profiteering by middlemen. They also focussed their attention on the protection of existing forests, and afore station. With the plinth of the pyramid of the tribal economy but on an even keel, the income of tribal households was bound to go up. The increased income, however, could not ensure better standard of living on a long-term basis unless the tribal society passed through the ordeal of socio-cultural revolution. As a step towards it the *Morcha* launched a drive for the enforcement of prohibition—the most important drag on tribal purse. It was a Herculean task. Drink was an integral part of tribal religion and culture. As pointed out earlier, all spirits, benign or malignant, cannot be propitiated without drink (*Handia*). The tribals even trace their origin and proliferation of their race to it. On social occasions they never fail to have the enough of it and to share it with their friends and relations. Bacchus had his followers though small in numbers even among ladies. The drive for prohibition met with very tough resistance. The general feeling was that it would amount to committing religious sacrilege. Besides, life would be rendered drab. The intensity of resistance to the idea of prohibition can be well imagined when we keep in mind that even Mahatma Gandhi was against tribal areas being dry.

Resistance was manifest in the shape of campaigners being assaulted. It, however, did not deter them from the pursuit of their goal. The leader appreciated the rationale behind tribal resistance. He sought to overcome it through the debunking of

false myths. He slept in the sacred grove in the night and contrary to popular belief returned in the morning alive. The people were impressed. The leader told them of his commission from the *Marang Buru*, the Chief Santhal God, and the message he had for them. They eschewed their usual habit. There were, however, others who were not impressed with the miracle performed by Sibu Soren. They still continued to imbibe the quantity of liquor, they could afford. In a society with a high degree of community cohesiveness and we-feeling, and equally high regard for community decisions, it was not difficult to wean people away from liquor. Stringent punishment was announced but had hardly to be enforced. A few alcohols were roughly dealt with. A drinking man is less a nuisance to himself than to his poor wife and children. The house-wife acutely feels how drinking husband upsets the balance. The drinking man not merely causes financial losses but he also destroys the family harmony. In order that a prohibition campaign is successful, women had to be mobilized. The technique as such could be quite clear once woman played a pivotal role to campaign against liquor. Drunken husbands were never welcome. Their arrival would promptly lead to the congregation of ladies who would heap insults on them until they apologised with the promise that they would never touch alcohol again. The success of the prohibition could certainly be ascertained from the disappearance of the liquor shops and crash in the *Mahuva* (*Bassia Latifolia*) prices. It had a salutary impact on tribal household economy and the status of women. With drink no longer part of the family budget and crash in the *Mahuva* prices the housewives could laddle out more food to inmates. They no longer had to suffer at the hands of those who displayed Dutch-courage. Similar efforts were made to prune expenses on other occasions. In the absence of drink and gaiety on social occasions life did really become drab. The *Morcha* organized regular archery tournaments, community singing, fairs etc. Such community meets were used to revive and revitalize cultural traditions and to instil a sense of national pride. The level of literacy among the tribal population was abysmally low. Many of them merely affixed their thumb impression but also were ignorant of

multiplication tables. It was extensively utilised by moneylenders who inflated their demands. The *Morcha* opened night schools popularly known as *Akil Akharas* in every village to educate boys and girls who worked in the day. The teachers were generally some youths with benefit of schooling for a few years. In some cases boys attending day schools were also drafted as teachers. The *Morcha* enlisted the support of sympathetic school teachers, tribals or otherwise, to help the night schools teachers improve their knowledge of pedagogy. The children were not always provided with textbooks and slates. In some instances there were not even lanterns. Even then schools were running and children were committing multiplication, tribals poems and stories to memory. Adults were persuaded to learn how to put their signatures. There were instances in which septugenarians, both man and women, had not merely learnt to sign their names but were also evincing keen interest in books read by their grand children to keep a track on the progress of their tiny tots. Sometimes educators were younger than educands, the former quite often stealing moments to persuade the village elders to learn 3 Rs. Sometimes many but often a few would fall in. It was indeed another world in the sense that parents volunteered to be taught by sons. Another interesting feature of the *Akil Akharas* was its integrative roles. Scheduled caste and backward class children were conspicuous by their presence in substantial numbers.

The tentative figures of number of *Akil Akharas* teachers, and attendance therein as on July 1976 in Tundi were as follows :

Total number of Akil-Akharas 129, Teachers 129

Total students — 6179

	Boys	Girls
6 to 11 years.	1784	1120
11 to 12 years.	1116	539
14 and above	1163	457
	4063	2116 = 6179

Bride-price and expenses relating to the entertainment of guests on the occasion of marriage ceremonies proved ruinous to tribals. While the marriage reforms sought to provide additional succour to the deficit tribal households, the *Morcha* initiated a series of measures to raise the status of women. It is in this sphere that contact with *Dikus* had led to some serious degenerating influences.

The celebration of marriage ceremonies entailed heavy expenses relating to the payment of brideprice, offer of presents and the entertainment of guests who numbered a legion. Gots or pigs would be slaughtered and plenty of country liquor would be served. Neither the groom's party nor the bride's one benefited from it. The only beneficiaries were moneylenders, traders and liquor contractors. In fact, the performance of marriage in the traditional way had been one of the important causes of tribal indebtedness and consequent land alienation. The *Morcha* launched sustained but successful campaign to reduce the incidence of expense among the tribals amounting to Rs. 12/-. The number of guests were equally cut to the same number. The food to be served was ordinary and drink would be conspicuous by its absence. Previously the celebration lasted for 4 to 5 days. It was cut down to one day. Prohibition brought about an increase in the income-stream. Marriage reforms, only tended to augment it. It strove to banish bigamy, polygamy and divorce on frivolous grounds. With these restrictions such occasion turned out to be drab. To impart fund and gaiety to it the *Morcha* persuaded people to celebrate marriages *en masse* covering larger expenses and assemblage of guests. Wife beating was stopped. Young women were debarred from working as housemaids in the exploiters' households to avoid miscegenation. Tribal women by and large knew how to work in the fields and forests and cook some monotonous meals. *Mahila Shilp Kala Kendra* was opened to impart skill in sewing, knitting, and embroidery to elderly women. All this strengthened the family ties and raised the status of women.

Achievements of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha

The achievements of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha by any standards are commendable. It brought about a transformation

in the social, economic and cultural milieu of the countryside. Through mass mobilisation it kept the exploiters at bay and again through the same technique sought to rejuvenate the decadent village economy. The *morcha* did not create new institutions. It rather adopted the traditional social institutions operating at the village (*Kulhidrup*), intervillage (*pargana*), and community levels (*Lo Bir Sendra*) to perform new functions in keeping with the needs of time.

The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha used these local institutions with drastic modifications in consonance with the objectives to be attained but at the same time not hurting tribal susceptibilities. As a step toward this end, it did not dislodge village chiefs from office who were sold over to the exploiters. It transformed them in a manner that they severed their ties with their exploiters and went whole hog with the struggling community. (The tribal leaders were themselves men of modesty, little understanding, and myopic vision. The exploiters by exploiting their fondness for drink and other disabilities won many of them over to their sides to facilitate their exploitation of the community). In the wake of massive participation and their own interests to break loose from the tentacles of the exploiters, they thought it prudent to side with their brethren rather than with *Dikus*. The *morcha* could achieve all those objectives described earlier. This ensured tribal solidarity against all rapacity of the exploiters. With community solidarity restored to its pristine level, other activities naturally followed. The *morcha* transferred the character of the social institutions to subserve its ends. With the co-operation of the traditional chiefs assured, the first step by the *morcha* was to change the nomenclature of all the three institutions. This change, however, was not to be just symbolic. It merely heralded change that were more far-reaching than the community had ever known. The village council was named as *Atu Baisi*. The traditional hereditary office of *manjhi Haram* at every village was made the President, *Paramanik*, as Secretary, and *Jog manjhi* and *Gorait* as the other two key officers to assist them. Besides, several village youths numbering 4 to 10 were inducted as volunteers. Their essential function were to gather people for the meeting, and inform the *Baisi*

on violaters of its decision. They were also entrusted with the task of preventing theft either of crop or property, guard the village at night against exploiters' evil designs, etc. The communal emphasis on social solidarity was revived. Emphasis was also laid on the integration of all those households irrespective of caste who suffered the same fate as tribals. Their association, however, was initially to be had for the purpose of legitimacy rather than decision-making. The broad objectives of *Atu Baisies* were not only to rid the tribals of the exploitative proclivities of the triumvirate (viz. moneylenders, traders, and landlords), but also to mobilize people to fight against such social evils as drinking, illiteracy, superstition and rejuvenate the village economy and society. In order to achieve these objectives its specific functions were to mobilize the tribal peasantry to forcibly harvest paddy from the fields alienated by the triumvirate, repudiate debts, free the bonded ones, open grainbanks, initiate collective farming, build livestock farms, dam rivers and hillstreams, open *Akll Akharas*, reduce marriage expenditures, prevent bigamy, polygamy and easy divorces, rigorous enforcement of prohibitions, and raise contribution for village funds (a sum of 10 Kgs. paddy and Rs. 5/- cash annually from each tribal household for payment to teachers of *Akll Akharas*, entertainment of visitors etc). *Manjhi Haram* through the help of the officials of *Atu Baisi* was to coordinate all the activities. However, the traditional *Sokha* was kept out of the *Baisi* office-bearers as he was considered as exploiting the tribals of their superstitious beliefs. He was, however, not dethroned but relegated to the background. The *Baisi* had to fight against such beliefs.

The institution at the second tier (inter-village council), traditionally known as *Pargana*, was named in the new context as *Vlchar Baisi* having the jurisdiction over 10 to 20 villages. It consists of a President and Secretary and *Manjhi Harams* of all the *Atu Baisies* in its jurisdiction as its members. It also has 15 to 20 volunteers drawn from the area to assist in similar manner as their counterparts in *Atu Baisi*. The President would be the most intelligent and influential among *Manjhi Harams*. The Secretary is elected. The *Vlchar Baisi* meets

once a fortnight. It helps coordinate the work of *Atu Balsies* in fighting out the exploiters and in strengthening the technical base of agriculture. Its functions also include mobilization of tribals for forcible harvesting, supervision of *Akil Akharas*, cooperative and livestock farming, programmes of social and cultural regeneration, promotion of horizontal solidarity, prevention of exploitation of forest resources and as an appellate court for *Atu Balsies*.

Lo-Bir-Sendra rechristened as *Chetan Balsi* was the final and third tier of Santal tribal institutions. As pointed out earlier it functioned on an ad hoc basis with no permanent officials. It has now not only been revitalized but also institutionalized so as to impart a regional *Waltanschuang* as opposed to the village one. It coordinates and integrates the activities of the Morcha in the same way as the first two tiers though its jurisdiction is much wider. It is charged with giving a proper direction to the movement so as to coordinate the short term and long term goals. In case there is a bigger onslaught from the vested interests, it mobilize people on an extensive scale so that their challenges are effectively met. At least on three occasions in Santals Parganas and once in Pirtanr it could organize massive mobilization to reduce the incidence of atrocities perpetrated by exploiters. On the 4th of February every year it embarks on a massive mobilization of tribal and non-tribal poor to attend the annual day of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha at Dhanbad. It has original jurisdiction to decide cases which involve ostracism or fines extending beyond Rs. 50/-. It supervises the export of items that enter into the consumption basket of the poor to the metropolis. Important centres for export, however, are Maniadih in Tundi P.S., and Ahilyapur, Gandey, and Herladih in Giridih P.S. Between 1973-75 its volunteers prevented carriage of such goods in bullock carts, trucks and buses to Dhanbad and other places. Even when such exports were allowed, tolls were collected. The *Chetan Balsi* also extends its sphere of influence to protect forests and promote afforestation. It directs moneylenders and other exploiters to appear before it for the settlement of disputes, supervises proper utilization of financial resources and initiates

measures to check corruption and excesses among office-bearers in all tiers below it. The supreme council at Palma is the apex of the special pyramid. It is the only new institution created by the Morcha. It formulates policies and coordinates activities at all levels. Its sphere of activity extends to inter *Chetan-Baisi* level and encompasses within its fold all functions pertaining to organisations at different levels. It collects funds for the implementation of collective and livestock farming, procurement of tractors, fertilizers, etc. It alone tackles questions where police officers, district administration, and other political leaders are involved. *Baisies* with different powers and jurisdictions including the Supreme Council decides in session. Domestic disputes would invariably be settled at the *Atu* and *Vichar Vaisi* levels. However, violation of community customs and witchcraft were very hard to deal with in the sense that santals still nurture a strong belief in the existence of witches. In some cases the decisions of primary organ were hardly acceptable but there was rarely any violation of a decision arrived at by the Supreme Council. How important such cases were will be evident from the fact that in the absence of effective intervention many lives would have been lost. *Baisies* have also acted as effective forms for the integration of tribals and non-tribals in the sense that their doors of justice were barred to none.

Consequences of the Movement

It has been a characteristic feature of all preceding tribal movements that they started with a bang only to end with a whimper. Except in the cases of *Kol Ulgulan* and Birsa Munda movement there was no pronounced feature of pan-tribalism. The tribals have today as in the past shown immense capacity to bear the exploitative productivities of the *Dikus*. Only when they had been pushed to the walls and subjected to all forms of exploitation they did rise in rebellion. With the movement turning overtly violent, state power was savagely pitted against them. Not being used to protracted struggle, acts of exemplary valour could hardly meet the demands of the situation. They rose like a tornado uprooting many but in the ultimate analysis failed to register substantial gains. The movements in the past had a millenarian content aiming at the resurrection of a golden

age with no vision of a new society to be built up. They hardly fought against the archaic manners, traditions and superstitions. Defeatism usually found its expression in the movements of religious revivalism which in essence pertained to the assimilation of some values pertaining to sanskritization.

The Tundi movement as pointed out earlier had been conceived differently. It had to have within its fold not merely tribals but also those who were producers irrespective of their caste, religion, or race. It had again been conceived as being an integral part of the movement of the working class in the metropolis. It had to be based on unity and struggle in the sense that parasites once transformed into producers would form an integral part of it. With the ushering in of such a society the age-long distinction between tribal and non-tribal elements would cease and there would be a massive social, economic and cultural regeneration. Human endeavour would be directed to control forces of nature rather than the exploitation of one section by another. Cooperation rather than competition would be the watchword. It is in the crucible of such a struggle that the *class-in-itself* would be transformed into *class-for-itself*.

In spite of the commendable successes of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha in paralysing exploiters, dynamizing rural economy, and fostering social and cultural regeneration, the movement came to operate in a somewhat obverse situation. The collective farming disappeared from several villages. Prohibition received a big jolt. Even grainbanks could not escape the calamitous effect. Horizontal solidarity weakened and the various social institutions revamped or created by the Morcha turned largely somewhat dysfunctional. The reasons for it may be ascribed to the failure of leadership coupled with the attitude of the administration armed with draconian powers during the emergency. The latter was hellbent on the eradication of the movement, the only difference being in the technique as compared with earlier movements. Jharkhand Mukti Morcha operated under the leadership of a triumvirate—A.K. Roy, Binod Bihari Mahato, and Sibu Soren. Roy operated among the colliery industrial workers, Mahato among Kurmis and Sibu among tribals. They coordinated their activities

but could forge no united front. The result was that each functioned autonomously and there was no in-built mechanism to analyse experience and draw necessary lessons from them. The agrarian movement in Tundi as such was spearheaded by Sibū. In spite of his good intentions, the lack of politicisation forced him to take to the wrong path. Sibū got heady with the immense reputation he enjoyed when Roy was in the prison. His people elevated him to legendary levels. The top echelons in district administration considered it a privilege to win his friendship. It made him oblivious of his responsibility to forge a dialogical relationship with the masses. He stood over them and presumed that they would carry out his commands. He turned into a Ceasars' appeal against whom could be made only to censor. It rendered the various social institutions dysfunctional, and culminated in a process where decision-making was monopolised. The tribals in the village of Baritanr (P.S. Pirtanr) in the district of Giridih had seized a truck belonging to one persons having allegedly killed an activist. Sibū consulted none. He rushed to the place of occurrence all by himself and contracted a deal with the truck-owner which ultimately resulted in the release of the vehicle. The secretive nature of the deal was enough to spark-off rumours. Sibū was alleged to have accepted a handsome amount for the release of the truck. The monopolisation of decision-making and the consequent rumour thereof, created fissures in his ranks particularly in Palma—the Sierra Mestra of Tundi. They started demanding explanations and account which Sibū could not furnish. It only helped to alienate cadres from the leader. The alienated cadres were hell-bent on Sibū biting the dust. They persuaded two tribals and a non-tribal to withdraw eight acres of land whose produce supported the *Mahila Shilp Kala Kendra*. Sibū took it as a personal affront rather than as a social one. His perverse logic dictated that the institution be kept alive without consideration of mass support. He came to a unilateral decision. The 50% of the produce of 24 acres under collective farming in Basticuli (P.S. Tundi) was appropriated to finance the *Kendra* at Palma. It resulted in a significant loss to members of the collective farming. The resentment was high because they had not been consulted. While the decision of the latter

was not questioned in public, private resentment was very high particularly because the people did not constitute the surplus sub-sector of the Tundi economy. With his alienation from grass-root cadres, Sibū was more and more constrained to bureaucratic pressures. The new Deputy Commissioner, hell-bent to destroy the movement, accorded him un-exceptional welcome. He promised to deliver much more funds for tribal development than his predecessor. He mobilized diversion of funds to Tundi both from Government and the so-called voluntary organisations. He always kept Sibū in the forefront. A dam was created at Basticuli. Sibū selected the site and the contractors. He supervised the whole process of implementation. He failed to argue the whole thing out with *Baisi*. He not only issued commands but also wanted them to obey it. The result was that he had to assault the recalcitrant elements who were to suffer from the choice of the site. It proved to be the last straw on the camels back. The new Deputy Commissioner after Mr. Saxena doled out funds simultaneously with the condition that Sibū should voluntarily surrender. The latter obliged him. He did not, however, again obtain a popular mandate. His followers, particularly in the villages he most frequented, interpreted it as an act of downright opportunism. Back home after three months he was not received like Birsa Munda. In fact his release from prison turned out to be a non-event. With Basticuli and Palma terribly hot for him, he transferred the headquarters of the movement to Pokharia (Tundi P.S.). It was not like Birsa shifting his headquarters from Chalked to Dombari for tactical reasons. It was on the contrary flight from popular anger. In Pokharia, Sibū turned out to be an agricultural extension agent because his activities come to be narrowly confined to around twenty villages. It was because of large scale diminution in the number of his cadres and the dissemination of his infamy from one place to another through the Santal kith and kins, the movement came to a grinding halt. It was however, through the intervention of A.K. Koy, released from jail which led to the integration of those involved in the movement. At the moment there is a big spurt in reviving the old spirit through the activation of various social institutions hitherto dormant.

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Whither Jharkhand

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Will Feminist Standards Survive in Jharkhand ?

RADHA KUMAR

The statements made here are based merely on two weeks of living with Santhal men and women, in company with party workers of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha. Four of us went together: we were all women, and we were feminists. We went to investigate reports of mass rape by the CRP and local mahajans as retaliation to Santhal attempts at re-appropriating land which should legally be theirs. As it happens, the trip was one of those last minute go-now-talk-later events, and our sojourn in the Santhal Parganas allowed no time for discussion either during or after the investigation. In other circumstances, we could have been accused of finding only what we wanted to see, but our own ignorance of tribal life was so woeful that we were unable even to direct our questions.

Given the scattered and relatively superficial nature of my knowledge, I have preferred to look at two aspects of women's oppression in the Santhal Parganas—rape and concubinage—in the hope of sketching general issues through an examination of the conditions in which they occur, and the different responses to them. In both rape and concubinage the men are dikkus and the women are Santhals and thus the two practices are surrounded by a thicket of bristling attitudes.

In matters of sex, dikku-tribal relationship is not a matter of usual domination. For dikkus, Santhals represent an open sexuality in direct contradiction with their own more rigid code of sexual control. In contrast with provincial Indian society (dikku society), Santhal society does allow a certain physical and sexual freedom for women: the same emphasis not placed on reproduction and the family. Adolescent sexuality is unhindered by laws of virginity and adult sexuality is not circumscribed by laws of adultery. Divorce is easily available through the panchayat, remarriage is frequent and the fathers are responsible for their children. Marriages are made in two ways: either the man and the woman decided to be married and their union is recognized by the panchayat—or they are discovered in the act of making love and their relationship is regularised by the panchayat. In neither case are arrangements made by the parents or property exchange involved. In addition, all agreements are oral, and though the panchayat is final arbiter, its rulings are not institutionalised, but vary from case to case, according to the individual situation.

Thus two major forces in the contemporary Indian deployment of sexuality have no application for the tribal community: neither the form of alliance, nor the juridical concept have any place in their social relations.¹ Marriage is simply marriage—not the cementing of a pact between two families, over property, money, or warriors. Equally, legislation is unknown, and is only now beginning to be felt necessary. These absences mark the Santhal community out as potentially subversive to the dikku community, in whose world both forces are deeply entrenched. In addition, the primitive, more “natural” sexuality

1. The latter can be seen in their attitude to land ownership too: the land settlements were first made in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and the importance of papers of ownership stressed ever since, few Santhals have papers to prove land ownership. It is the ubiquitous dikkus of course who have the papers and who have alienated Santhal land through using false names, or through forgery. Even today we find that many Santhals have kept the wrong papers and destroyed the right ones, even though there are people in their villages who can read—who have read their documents and advised them wrongly, simply through misconception.

of the Santhals has remained untouched by either the rigorous streamlining of sexuality into reproduction or the ensuing separation between reproduction and sexuality which is now achieving an alienation comparable to that of labour power from the producer.

For dikkus the sight of a Santhal woman walking along, breasts free and with only a flimsy piece of cloth covering her, is deeply disturbing. Not only are dikku women covered from hair to toe nail, but dikku morality has sustained itself by creating two categories of women: the whore and the mother. The former's existence is an invitation to molestation and rape; the latter is a domestic serf. In this conception of female sexuality there is only one place for Santhal women: that of the whore. This then becomes the rationale for prostituting them, keeping them as concubines, and on occasion, molesting and raping them.

I have taken rape and concubinage as distinct for two reasons: firstly, because they are qualitatively different—the former being an act of violence and the latter one of the market (i.e., a commodity relation). In the context of a clash between two communities in which one dominates over the other, both are attempts to destroy the autonomy of the subject community—rape as attack and concubinage as incorporation (of the 'other' community into the social norms of the dominant community). Aggression and incorporation are fairly standard weapons in establishing the hegemony of a community or in repressing a struggle. Normally they are used complementarily, and the Santhal Parganas is no exception to this rule. Few people see that rape is qualitatively different from plunder, arson and assault. This is hardly surprising, since the use of rape in this way has a pedigree stretching back to time immemorial. In pre-capitalist societies rape was used by victorious armies to demonstrate the inferiority of subject races as well as to further intimidate them. In recent memory the example of Vietmen stands as reminder.

What the dikkus and their State allies, the CRP are doing, to demoralise the agitating Santhals is no deviation from the tradition. Yet it remains true that rape is not simply another

spice in the titillating broth of atrocity: it is the one practice which is directed solely against women, and only by extension, against the community. Why then is rape in this context seen primarily as an attack against the community and not against the women? And is this view held equally by dikkus and tribals?

In fact, differences exist between the dikkus use of rape and the tribal response to it. True, Santhals are humiliated by it, but their humiliation is far more acutely felt with concubinage, and no social stigma attaches to a women who is raped. This is in marked contrast to the dikku view of a raped women, who is held to be impure and to have in some sense deserved rape. If she is married, her husband's honour will be held to have been smirched and he may throw her out. (Recently, a man committed suicide because his wife had been raped). If she is unmarried, then her chances of getting married are irrevocably ruined, and her father's honour diminished (so that her younger sisters have difficulties in getting married). In the Santhal Parganas, on the other hand, raped women continue to live with their husbands or parents, and marry when they wish. (This attitude, however, is beginning to show signs of change, which I will discuss later).

An explanation for the differences between the dikkus and the tribals can be sought in their social structures. While tribal society is based on communal property, dikku society is based on private property. In both, a certain measure of reproductive control is socially maintained, but in the dikku case it has generated an attempt to locate reproduction at the centre of female sexuality, making it the primary goal of a women's existence. Here marriage is seen as her profession, monogamy and fertility as its yardsticks, and virginity as a pre-requisite for marriage. Feminist theory explains this structuring of women's lives by linking it to the private property form, with its emphasis on succession, the continuity of the family and the women's role as reproducer. This last becomes central to the former two and implies stringent control. As reproducer, a women's sexuality is alienated from her, becoming the property of her husband/his family. In this context, rape becomes an attack on property—being the appropriation of a woman's sexuality by an

outsider/conqueror, and symbolising his destruction of her owner's honour/right of possession, etc.

For the Santhal man, female sexuality is essentially receptive. Until recently, festivals were celebrated with sexual display, not only through dance, but also through drink and lovemaking. The existence of communal rather than private property meant that reproduction was not linked to either succession or to the continuity of the family. In fact neither has any particular significance for the Santhal community. Reproduction of course does, but it is linked with maintaining the community, rather than protecting property—and can be seen in one of their most important taboos; that on relationships with non-tribals. This taboo has existed since the first dikkus trickled across the borders of the Santhal Parganas, and individuals violating it have had to face considerable retribution. Reports have it that this retribution had a ritual form and was known as *bitlaha*. In cases of sexual relationship between tribal and dikku, men from the villages would march to the rebel's house, raze the house to the ground and put up a broomstick on the site, break the furniture and utensils, piss in the kitchen and use both savage and obscene language. In cases of rape, the same ritual was performed against the man.

Bitlaha stopped being used soon after India became independent, and today the taboo against non-tribal relationships operates primarily against concubinage. The Santhal response to this is much stronger than to rape or molestation. Their lack of response is understandable in cases of CRP-rape, defences against which are non-existent—neither preventive nor punitive action being possible, even through the law. CRP rape apart, even individual rape or molestation go unmarked by any sign of anger from the Santhals. Partly this is because rape for the Santhals is an external phenomenon, occurring either in situations of reprisal or in isolation, whereas concubinage requires the consent of the women, and is hence seen as an internal betrayal of the community.

This attitude shows also in the way that women are treated: while no stigma attaches to the raped women, a concubine is excommunicated. Though *bitlaha* itself has ceased to exist, a watered down version of it is often practised: if the couple remain within easy reach of the villagers their house is visited

by an all-male delegation who beat them up and attempt to drive them away from the village. In addition, while divorce is accepted in tribal communities and the woman can go back to her parents, live alone or remarry, this is not allowed to the woman who has become a concubine. Even if she returns to the village, she is thrown out unless she confesses to repenting of her act in front of the panchayat, swears never to be a concubine again, *and* the panchayat forgives her.

The force of the taboo is clearly acknowledged by its opponents. Normally the prostitution/concubinage of the woman takes place through her removal from the village : if the dikku's house is not at a distance from the village; the couple retreat to a town; Santhal women are exported to the Punjab/the NE region and are forced into prostitution; they get jobs as migrant truckers and prostitution is one of their duties; or they get jobs in the town and earn extra cash through prostitution, etc.

Even though Santhal villagers are aware that such practices are rapidly increasing, they continue to maintain the taboo within their villages. In the face of growing concubinage and prostitution, this attempt to retain a certain autonomy assumes a last-ditch stance, which is conspicuously undermined by the expanding dikku hegemony over wealth, power and resources. The process of incorporation has already made considerable headway: in the towns it has created a community of domestics, workers, prostitutes, etc. all regarded with extreme contempt by dikkus. Even in the villages dikku customs are being adopted: richer peasant women are beginning to wear sindhoor, stay at home and dress in the Hindu fashion. One such woman would not allow her niece, who had been raped, to speak to us. The reason for this was that to admit to rape was to bring shame upon the family. This family were already somewhat alien within their Santhal environment, and were treated both with a certain respect for their wealth, and with reticence.

Such attitudes are noticeable because they are not yet widespread in the community. The Santhal resistance to incorporation has hitherto been an instinctive adherence to their tribal traditions. Under the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha however, these forms of resistance are breaking down. One of the first

campaigns of the JMM was an anti-alcohol movement, which sought to abolish the traditional mahua brew as well as dikku-distilled liquors. JMM activists told us that there was considerable opposition to their anti-alcohol drive from the Santhals, and in some cases Santhals had to be beaten into submission.

On the issues of rape and concubinage, and prostitution, the JMM are unequivocal in denying both tradition and present practice. Three months ago, some of their leaders spoke to us of the need for restricting divorce, introducing monogamy and ensuring the continuity of the family. Today they say that all three existed in pre-dikku tribal society and have been eroded only under the dikku regime. This ludicrous falsification of history may be dismissed by us, but it remains dangerous in its implications for Santhals, who regard the JMM as "their" party and hail its leader as "Guruji" (the title itself being a dikku import).

The JMM is no different from other parties in upholding a petty-bourgeois morality which eschews feminism. One would have hoped a better outlook from an organisation entrenched in a community whose feminist values are of a high standard. Our only hope is that the JMM is a newer and less rigid organisation and will be in a position to appraise their own customs properly so as to offer chances of change.

Jharkhand : Community or Proletariat

DILIP SIMBON

What is the problem of Jharkhand ? Is the demand for it merely yet another example of communal/parochial sentiment so common to the last century or so of 'modernisation' in the subcontinent? In certain respects, it is, because it shares many features of community protectionism, which can be defined as the politics of weightage, reservation, geopolitical separatism (whether of provincial or sovereign variety). But on the other hand, it possesses peculiarities which give it a dimension beyond that of parochialism, even though the latter sentiment may be the political horizon of some of its proponents.

First and foremost, the Jharkhandis are not a community in search of a homeland nor is the dominant politics of Jharkhand merely a matter of a demand for reservations, in legislatures or jobs. Even though incoherently set forward, there are far more deep-seated grievances and problems faced by the Jharkhandis, some of which are beyond the scope of 'solutions' which can be demanded of governments. There is the memory of a lost community, an integrated society with its own distinctive ethos, now destroyed by the advent of 'modernisation'. There is

sadness and anger at the decimation of the forests which provided much of the sources of livelihood of the Adivasi tribes, as also at the brutality displayed both to land and people, by the process of industrialisation. There is the decades long experience of being steadily rendered destitute and driven off their lands by a combination of personal or impersonal forces—moneylenders, petty officials, industry. And the Adivasis¹ have seen the advent of their miseries as directly related to the massive influx of the 'outsiders', who have then proceeded to appropriate all the 'fruits' of the industrialisation which they themselves have initiated. In a nutshell, the culture of Jharkhand is the union between a group of Communities and a certain territory with which they intimately identify, and the nature of their struggles reflects this intimacy.

Given the steadfast virulence with which successive generations of North Bihar politicians have opposed the demand for Jharkhand, as well as the weakness for compromises displayed by many of their own leaders, it is not surprising that the Adivasis, for their part too, have seen operating against them another gigantic conspiracy. Apart from this view, there is also the "regional development" approach, which sees the whole problem as a result of deficiencies in governmental policy—as if to say that the entire experience of destitution and social oppression of the Adivasis is the result of oversights in various planning bureaux. Lack of proper leadership is another reason advanced by some sympathisers of the movement for Jharkhand as cause of its frequent failures which of course is a tautology: "Chota Nagpur is backward because it lacks good leaders; it lacks good leaders because, after all, it is backward". Again, we have another approach to the problem which is left-oriented and which tends to see it as a "self-determination of nationalities" question as per the writings of Lenin, Stalin etc. It is said that the people of Jharkhand suffer two kinds of exploitation, class exploitation and national exploitation. Liberation from the former can only come about in united struggle with the rest of

1. Throughout this study "Adivai" has been used to mean autochthones (*adivasi*) in general, not Scheduled Tribes alone.

the exploited people in India (why only India?); whereas liberation from national exploitation is centred around the demand for Jharkhand. This distinction is perhaps made in order to concentrate all energies on the "immediate task", of achieving Jharkhand province. But it is not clear whether any such differentiation of class oppression vs. national oppression is valid in real life or whether social consciousness exists in two compartments, one marked "economics" and the other "culture". Nor is it clear what grounds there are for believing that national oppression will end with the achievement of a separate province, or that the right of nations of self-determination ends at autonomy, rather than at complete sovereignty. (How many provinces of socialist republics have been allowed to secede to form sovereign states?).

The argument of Jharkhand nationalism puts forward a series of obvious facts; the lack of encouragement for cultural and educative development of the Adivasi people, the relegation of Adivasis to the unorganised and unskilled sectors of wage labour; the destruction of the social life of the traditional tribal communities (a process which began over 150 years ago); the decimation of the forests; the heavy influx of 'outsiders engaged in commercial or skilled labour occupations, etc. These facts are not linked together in a coherent political outlook, but rather are used to support the argument that Jharkhand is 'backward' despite its riches, and that this backwardness can be remedied by the emergence of a separate province. Since 'Jharkhandism' admits itself to be an establishmentarian, politics this superficial approach is understandable. That is, its methods and aims are totally compatible with the Constitution, the law and with capitalism,—even though the situation itself has far more subversive potential. So it is not surprising that Jharkhandism neither has a radical understanding of the oppression faced by the Adivasis, nor does it provide any political/social answers save that of separate statehood.

The Workers of Jharkhand

But there is a different way of looking at what has happened to Chota Nagpur and its people, and of placing it in a wider context. Unlike the tribal states of the North East which are

on the fringe of Indian territory, Jharkhand is in Central India, adjacent to the Indo-Gangetic plain, and much more vulnerable in a cultural confrontation. Moreover it has turned out to be the misfortune of the Adivasis of Chota Nagpur that the land which they consider their home also contains the richest and most heavily concentrated mineral deposits in India, including iron and coal which are so crucial to any industrialisation process. *The most significant fact about Jharkhand is, therefore, that it is simultaneously the homeland of a large Adivasi population and the cradle of heavy industry in India.* This fact must be seen as the mainspring of the whole problem. Thus, for example, while the process of evicting Adivasis from their lands began as long ago as the early 19th century, it became an avalanche with the onset of heavy industry, giant plants, townships, extensive mining, hydro-electric power generation, etc. Along with this also came the rapid disintegration of the traditional communities, the commercial exploitation of the forests and the heavy influx of 'outsiders'.

Placed within such a context it becomes easier to understand the most glaring social feature of the condition of the Adivasis; that *they form the bulk of the proletariat of Jharkhand.* It is equally significant that they are the most depressed, unorganized, unstable, and unskilled section of the proletariat and this perhaps is the reason why their class character is somewhat overlooked when compared with the highly skilled metallurgical workers for instance. The gigantic industrialisation process in Chota Nagpur has operated in a vicious circle for the Adivasis—on the one hand it has rendered ever-increasing numbers of them destitute through evictions, destruction of sources of livelihood etc., and on the other it has utilized their destitute condition to employ them for a very specific role in this industrialisation. And that is the role of sweat labour, or sub-proletariat as it is called by some. So the accumulation of Capital (otherwise known as the Progress of the Nation) has required of the Adivasis that they perform the function of coolies. After all, without coolies, there can be no progress. What better source of cooly labour than one which springs from the same land upon which the drama of Economic Growth is being enacted? the Adivasis : men, women and children, have mined for coal

and ores when conditions were at their most backward; they have broken stones and constructed roads; dug earth and made bricks; picked in the slag heaps which are the defecations of steel mills; they have loaded and unloaded trucks and railway wagons constructed big plants and townships; and pulled lakhs of rickshaws. They still do so, because the process of industrial expansion has not ended and such types of work will always be needed, even when the most heavy phases of construction are over. Some of them hope that with the advent of separate Jharkhand they may be liberated from this most wretched drudgery. Who dares tell them that capital has always tended to use communities like theirs for a very specific purpose?

Because most of them have tended to work in gangs, under contractors, as family units, in seasons etc., they have been denied even the status of working class. Upto a few decades ago, when coal mining was at its most hazardous,² whole families would work in the shafts, the men digging and picking, the women and children loading and shifting. They were invariably (and still are) paid by piece-rates, that "most fruitful source of reduction of wages and capitalistic cheating", as Marx called it.³ Gangs of Adivasi men or women some young enough to be considered children, are recruited by ruthless contractors, often with the help of certain desparate elements within the tribals themselves. From the employer's viewpoint, gang labour is the cheapest, the most easily controllable and easily dispensed with. The contract involves a more piece rate--no housing; no medical care; no heavy supervision; no trade unions, strikes and labour courts and all such troublesome considerations that a proletariat is selfish enough to require of the capitalist class. Describing the conditions of the British agricultural proletariat in the mid 19th century, Marx writes⁴—

2. Readers are referred to Corbridge's study of conditions in Iron ore mines—editor.

3. *Capital*, Vol. I, Chapter XXI.

4. The quotations which follow are from *Capital*, Vol. I, Chapter XXV, Section 5 (e).

“The continual emigration to the towns, the continual formation of surplus population in the country through the concentration of farms, conversion of arable land into pasture, machinery etc., and the continual eviction of the agricultural population by the destruction of their cottages, go hand in hand....Their pauperism is ultimately a motive to their eviction and the chief source of their miserable housing which breaks down their last power of resistance, and makes them mere slaves of the landed properties and the farmers. Thus the minimum of wages becomes a law of Nature to them....The temporary or local want of labour brings about no rise in wages, but a forcing of the women and children into the fields, and an exploitation at an age constantly lowered. As soon as the exploitation of the women and children takes place on a larger scale, it becomes in turn a new means of making a surplus population of the male agricultural labourer and of keeping down his wage... In the East of England thrives a beautiful fruit of this vicious circle the so-called gang system....”

Are not literally lakhs of Adivasis familiar with evictions: for collieries, townships, factories, and reservoirs for hydroelectric plants? Are they not familiar with the extensive exploitation of women and children and with seasonal migrations to places as far off as West U.P. and Punjab for harvest work? Is it not well known that some of them are even kept in bondage hundreds of miles from their homes? Marx goes on :

“The gang consists of 10 to 40 or 50 persons, women young persons of both sexes...and children of both sexes ...At the head is the gang master, always an ordinary agricultural labourer, generally what is called a bad lot, a scapegrace, unsteady, drunken, but with a dash enterprise....He is the recruiting sergeant for the gang, which works under him, not under the farmer. He generally arranges with the latter for piece work, and his income... depends almost entirely upon the dexterity with which he manages to extract within the shortest time the greatest possible amount of labour from his gang. The

farmers have discovered that women work steadily only under the direction of men, but the women and children, once set going, impetuously spend their life force....The gang master goes from one farm to another, and thus employs his gang from 6 to 8 months in the year. Employment by him is, therefore, much more lucrative and more certain for the labouring families than employment by the individual farmer....For the farmer there is no more ingenious method of keeping his labourers well below the normal level, and yet of always having an extra hand ready for extra work, of extracting the greatest possible amount of labour with the least possible amount of money, and of making adult male labourer redundant...."

All this does not seem a far cry from the *sirdari* system which still is the mode of employment of lakhs of Adivasi workers.

To go a little further, even those sections of Adivasis who own land and migrate seasonally are in large part basically a rural proletariat. Every year during certain seasons tens of thousands of Santals migrate from Santhal Parganas to Bengal for agricultural work or to other parts of Chota Nagpur for working in brick kilns and other sorts of manual work. The small plots of land they own is in an infertile region, and does not produce enough to maintain the families for more than 8 months in the year. The wage labour is a necessity, and the seasonal nature of the availability of their labour is a source of great advantage to their petty employers. This is a proletariat for whose maintenance and reproduction no overhead costs are required, which will go home to its tiny plots of land and maintain itself for the time that it is redundant and which, because of its attachment to its agricultural household, will tolerate scandalously low wages merely to keep body and soul together for the season that their land is fallow. An employer's dream comes true.

Capital, Race and Class

The Adivasis are by no means the only section of the population—either in the sub-continent or in the world, whose specific ethnic/cultural characteristics mark them out for a

specific sort of wage-slavery. Various sections of the world working class are similarly absorbed into the lowest, worst paid, worst organised and most heavily strenuous stages of the work process. Differentiations of race, age, and sex have always been utilized by capital in an optimum way, but today in several sectors of the world economy, ethnic and cultural divisions among the working class have become crucial to the operation of those sectors and have also led to severe social crises. In certain parts of Western Europe, for example, racism has become a major problem for the state machinery, apart from being a deep seated obstruction to worker's solidarity. Immigrants 10-15% of the workforce in Western Europe, and they come from some less developed European regions, such as Portugal, the South of Italy, the Balkans i.e., as well as from scores of backward, economies the world over—Turkey, the mediterranean Arab Countries, Africa, the West Indies, the Indian subcontinent etc. etc.⁵ They are, for the most part, semi-skilled workers and are concentrated in the building, public works, machine tools and service industries. They perform the most strenuous, dirty and worst paid jobs and are invariably the most vulnerable and badly organised section of the working class.

Is all this something new? Why does it happen? Do Adivasi workers in Jharkhand have something in common with Senegalese Africans in France, Turks in Germany, West Indians in Britain, Mexicans in California? To explore this question a little in depth, it would be useful to look at the early phase of the industrial revolution in Britain and see if any similar phenomenon occurred then.

In 1841, the population of Ireland stood at 8.2 million. In 1846 occurred the great famine in which over a million Irish lost their lives. Between 1846 and 1865, the population of Ireland diminished to 5.5 million, immigration to the USA alone accounting for 1.6 million.⁶ In just under 20 years, Ireland had suffered a 31% decline in its population. Again, in 1841, there were over 400,000 inhabitants of Great Britain who had been

5. See John Berger and Jean Mohr, *A Seventh Man*—for a documentary of the lives of immigrant workers in Europe.

6. Figures from Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Ch XXV, (f).

born in Ireland, and many more tens of thousands were born in Britain to Irish parents.⁷ Thus roughly 6% of the entire contemporary Irish population was working in Britain. They were overwhelmingly Catholic, were concentrated in the large industrial centres and were the poorest paid labourers. In Liverpool and Manchester 20-33% of the entire working population was Irish. Successive failures of the potato-crop leading to famines (in particular the ones of 1821 and 1846); the conversion of land under cereals into pastures, the heavy concentration of land-holdings and the mass evictions of peasant 'freeholders' between 1828-30, all fuelled the migration. The most destitute went to England, the slightly more fortunate to America and Canada. Wherever they went, they sent remittances back to Ireland, and made heroic efforts to save enough passage money for bringing over the rest of the family. In Ireland, they lived crowded into small hovels, sleeping on straw or bare ground filling their stomachs with meals of dry potatoes. They were the cheapest labour in Europe, and for the English employers the most ideal means of undercutting English labour. But E.P. Thompson analyses the much more ambivalent significance of Irish immigration :

"Paradoxically it was the very success of the pressures effecting changes in the character structure of the English working man which called forth the need for a supplementary labour force unmoulded by the industrial work discipline. This discipline, as we have seen, required steady methodical application, inner motivations of sobriety, forethought and punctilious observation of contracts; in short, the controlled paying-out of energies in skilled or semi-skilled employments. By contrast, the heavy manual occupations at the base of industrial society required a spend-thrift expense of sheer physical energy—an alteration of intensive labour and boisterous relaxation which belongs to pre-industrial labour rhythms, and for which the English artisan or weaver

7. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* Ch. XII (iii).

was unsuited by reason of his weakened physique and his Puritan temperament.

Thus Irish labour was essential for the Industrial Revolution, not only—and perhaps not primarily—because it was ‘cheap’ (the labour of English weavers and farm workers was cheap enough in all (conscience), but because the Irish peasantry had escaped the imprint of Baxter and Wesley.⁸ Demoralized in Ireland by a sub-subsistence economy...they had acquired a reputation for lethargy and fecklessness. Energy was no asset in a land where the good tenant was penalized by the doubting of his rent. In England they were capable of astonishing feats, showing a...willingness...and preservance in the severest...and most disagreeable kind of coarse labour...such as attending on masons excavating earth for harbours, docks, canals, roads, carrying heavy good, loading and unloading vessels.⁹

An analysis of Irishmen employed in Lancashire in 1835 found that “English labourers were preferred in all skilled occupation, having that steady preservance which factory employment peculiarly requires: ‘The English are more steady, clearly, skilful...and are more faithful in the fulfilment of contracts made between master and servant’. Although many thousands of Irish were employed in the cotton industry, ‘few, if any, are ever employed in the superior processes....’”¹⁰ When it came to unskilled occupations, however, the evidence of a Birmingham employer was as follows:

“The Irish labourers will work any time....I consider them very valuable labourers and we could not do without them....An Englishman could not do the work they do. When you push them they have a willingness to oblige which the English have not; they would die under anything before they would be beat....”¹¹

8. Early 19 Century methodist preachers who had spent their lives uprooting pre-industrial traditions from the industrial districts, and inculcating the ‘Christian’ virtues of thrift, sobriety, abstinence from sexual ‘license’ and alcohol, avoidance of traditional ‘feasts’ etc. etc.

9. E. P. Thompson.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

The Irish were considered good humoured and impulsive, amenable more to personal than economic incentives. They "displayed the same exuberance and indiscipline in their relaxation as in their work. It was said of them that on Saturday night when they received their wages, and after they had settled their debts, "...they go drinking as long as the remnant of their wages holds out." On the Monday morning, they are penniless... that they had "no care for the morrow, and live only for the passing moment."¹² Paid by piece rate or gang rate, they would be "tempted to overwork themselves, and to ruin their health and constitution in a few years". A contemporary observer who watched them at work unloading sacks of grain in the docks, calculated that they would walk a distance of some 43 miles a day carrying heavy loads.

"Thus to an extraordinary degree", says E. P. Thompson, "the employers had the best of a labour supply from the preindustrial and the industrialized worlds. The disciplined worker at heart disliked his work, the same character-structure which made for application and skill erected also barriers of self-respect which were not amenable to dirty or degrading tasks...(The Irish) lacked the puritan virtues of thrift and sobriety as much as those of application and forethought."

For the contemporary Englishmen, the Irish were just plain stupid. But, as Thompson comments, the Irish labourers, mentality was "a 'moral' and not an 'intellectual' defect"—(by which he refers to the psycho-cultural features of collective character). The Irish came from an unindustrialized society, were unused to contractual wage-labour, and were deeply rooted in their own communal traditions. And it was precisely these aspects of their character that were seized upon by their employers, whether in England or in North America, to squeeze profits out of Irish lives.¹³

12 E. P. Thompson.

13. The Irish also took with them to England and America their rebellious disposition, their challenging attitudes to authority, their fierce heroic courage, and their traditions of secret societies. In a very short time they established themselves as the most militant sections of the working class

To return to more modern times, we find that the employment of immigrant workers has reached stable levels in western Europe and that these workers are systematically employed in particular sectors of the economy such as the building trade, services, public works, etc. While Thompson's insights into the preindustrial psyche of the Irish in 19th Century England still hold, there are also today, legal political disabilities imposed on the migrants in Europe, which adds to their utility for European capital. Upto 1972, for example, 80% of immigrants into France were technically illegal entries, and the French minister for employment made the remarkable admission that "Illegal immigration is not without usefulness; if international regulations were strictly enforced, we might lack manpower."¹⁴ Illegal workers can be made to accept abnormally low wages and bad living conditions, and can be denied the most basic trade union rights and social security benefits that the European working classes have won for themselves over decades. Even legal entrants are subject to discriminatory regulations and can be dismissed and expelled from the country with ease. In 1967 Germany exported a considerable fraction of its recessionary unemployment and saved about 1000 million Deutschmarks in unemployment benefit simply by expelling huge numbers of immigrants.¹⁵

Castells, in his article¹⁶ on immigrant workers in Europe, states that they play a crucial and systematic role in preventing recessions from turning into crises, and as a countervailing tendency against the overall historic decline in the rate of Profit. They are the lowest paid, the healthiest (because the unhealthy ones are quickly and cheaply replaced), they work in the worst safety and health conditions, thus permitting savings in work organization. The social cost to capital of reproducing their

14. Quoted in 'Prisoners in Exile', by A. Adams an article on and Senegalese workers in France—From the book *Peasants and Proletarians: The Struggles of Third World Workers* ed. by R. Cohen P. Gutkind, and P. Brazier.

15. Ref. Manuel Castells' articles "Immigrant Workers and Class Struggles" in the same book cited above.

16. Ibid

labour power is much below average, not only because they accept much worse living conditions but also because they are mostly unmarried or 'forced' bachelors, and the costs of rearing them from childhood till working age or of looking after them after their working life, is borne by their country of origin. Moreover, they operate as a world reserve army of unemployed or potential unemployed, thus maintaining a constant pressure on the wage levels of the indigenous working classes. And their unfamiliarity with the cultural milieu in which they work, plus their legal status as foreigners, subtracts, from their capacity to fight back. Castelles argues :

"....The utility of immigrant labour to capital derives primarily from the fact that it can act towards it as though the labour movement did not exist, thereby moving the class struggle back several decades. A twenty-first century capital and a nineteenth century proletariat—such is the dream of monopoly capital in order to overcome its crisis..."

...Immigrant workers do not exist because there are 'arduous and badly paid' jobs to be done, but rather, arduous and badly paid jobs exist because immigrant workers are present or can be sent for to do them...¹⁷" (emphasis added).

This last point is extremely important, because it focuses on the relation between the class struggle and wage levels, working conditions, legal status, etc., i.e., what Marx called the historico-moral determinant of wages. This is to say, capital will not only utilize the given incapacities and weaknesses of a labour force for its own ends, it will impose fresh incapacities onto it unless it is forced to do otherwise, or unless it is necessary to alter working conditions in order to optimize profits. We do not have far to look for examples. If there were not a vast and near-destitute child population in India, it is highly unlikely that the 'dhaba' and cheap hotel trade would last a single day.

Governments right across the world, sections of the capitalist class within countries and internationally, all participate in

17. Ibid.

the process of internationalization of the working class for the optimization of profit. The governments of India and Pakistan earn millions through the remittances of workers in the Arab Gulf (75% of the labour force in the U.A.E. is Indo-Pakistani)¹⁸, while so far the workers have been severely repressed, for any attempt at organizing against their employers. The notorious South African government has produced the novel idea of the 'Bantustans' or black home lands. Black workers can now be considered foreigners in the 'white' industrial areas because they are granted citizenship rights only in the Bantustans. Even the 'socialist bloc' has joined the game. Over a million Yugoslavs work in and remit money from West Germany. Last year negotiations were on for the export of labour gangs from Peoples China to work in the building trade in Singapore.¹⁹ The one common feature about all this, is of course, the deliberate move against the organising capacity of the workers. Needless to say examples from all across the globe can be given.

Within India, certain regions have acquired historical importance as source areas for labour of specific types. Thus, East U.P. and North Bihar were the happy hunting ground for labour recruiters for the sugarcane plantations of Fiji, Mauritius and the West Indies. Till today the so-called 'Purabiyas' are an important section of the cooly labour in Bombay and Calcutta as also of harvesting labour in the 'wheat bowl'.²⁰ Nepal and the Indian Himalayan regions provide lakhs of domestic slaves for households to the Indo-Gangetic plain and thousands

18. *Times of India*, 7/6/80. The medieval rubbish that rules the Emigrates is already getting scared of the immigrants. A report published there talks of the "hundreds of thousands of brown faces creeping into our country like ants...Imagine what would happen if this class resorted to organizing unions and strikes...this could threaten the ruling authorities and...could cause a political explosion."

19. Some references to China's entry into the building and engineering labour market in the Arab Gulf region are made in the magazine *Sunday* of 18/5/80.

20. Even in coal-mines, the 'Gorakhpuri labourers' recruited by the Government for mine-owners had to live in conditions worse than the local labourers. They were practically prisoners. For an account see S. Kumarmangalam. *Coal Industry in India*, 1973.

of young women from these areas fall prey to the so called "white slave" traffic i.e., prostitution. It is significant that the employment of Adivasis in the coal mines of Jharia registered a decline in phases of a rise in the technical composition of capital²¹, as in the 1920s, when shafts and galleries began to replace the surface and shallow mines, tramlines were introduced for internal haulage, and dynamite blasting was introduced. A number of tribal miners left the coalfields in this period either because they were operating as family units and mechanised underground haulage made many women and children redundant, or because they were unaccustomed to the dynamite blasting, or because they found that the tribal womenfolk became increasingly subjected to molestation underground by the growing population of 'outsider' workers and employees. What is noteworthy here is that a large proportion of Adivasis were employed in mining when it was at a relatively primitive stage. Again, various government reports on tea garden labour in Assam mention the preference for Adivasi labour shown by plantation managers. (As is obvious, this is a highly labour-intensive industry).²² The census figures of 1911 show that between 40-50% of the tea garden labour came from Bihar and Orissa and Chota Nagpur (when this was shown as a consolidated region, the majority came from Chota Nagpur). From the mid to the late 30's, about 50% were Chota Nagpuris—in the main, Santals, Mundas and Oraons. The Annual Reports on Labour Immigration into Assam, which had a separate head for 'Chota Nagpur and Santal Pargana's showed that there were an average 1.80 lakh Adivasis in Assamese tea gardens between 1900-1914, a high point of 2.37 lakhs in 1919-20, and an average of 1.6 lakhs from 1920-32. Apart from this, many of the workers from Central Provinces were also tribals such as Gonds. If it is noted that there were numerous instances of tribals declaring their language to be

21. For information on the employment of Adivasis in the coalfields, I am indebted to Anjan Ghosh.

22. For information on Assamese tea garden labour I am indebted to Rana Behal.

Assamese and Bengali when approached by Assamese or Bengali census officials, the percentage of tribals in the tea garden workforce will be seen to be still higher.

Back to Jharkhand

So the Adivasis are not unique in their experience of insertion into a specific level of the work process. And if one looks at the features of migrant labour all over the world for decades gone past, including migrant tribals in Assamese tea gardens, one can see that the problem is not a geopolitical one; it is a *class* problem. The coincidence is that Jharkhand is not merely the ground for a specific kind of labour force, as was Ireland in the 19th century, but is also simultaneously the very arena for the industrialization which requires that labour force. (In this respect it bears similarity with the western Iranian province of Khuzistan, bordering Iraq and the Persian Gulf. Khuzistan is the richest oil-bearing site in Iran as well as the home of its Arab minority who have now raised the demand for 'Arabistan'). It is this coincidence which had such a shattering impact on the people of Chota Nagpur, because it has been one and the same process which has destroyed their communities, overrun their lands and forests, and hardened them into the worst kinds of working conditions.

The oppression suffered by the Adivasis has been characterized as a 'national question'. If we reconsider this in the light of the above discussion, certain questions emerge. The first is, if Jharkhand does become a province, will those processes end which have destroyed community life, the forests and the lands? Even if some Adivasis obtain access to better paid jobs will not the majority of them continue to do the jobs they have done so far? Is it not true to say that the badly paid dirty, badly organized, unstable working conditions in these types of work will only be removed by a heightened class consciousness and proletarian militancy?

Secondly, if Jharkhand emerges as some kind of tribal homeland in Central India, what will happen to the rest of the tribals in Western India, the Deccan, and South India? One is reminded of the Muslim homeland of 1947, even though no sovereignty is demanded in this case. Nationalism is fundamentally a

mysterious and mystifying ideology which constructs the entity of 'nation' by playing down the aspect of class, and laying stress on certain homogenous features of a particular community or people. But all states are essentially institutions of class oppression, and no amount of nationalist propaganda can hide this fundamental secular fact. 'Homeland's may acquire statehood and sovereignty in greater or lesser degree, but sooner or later must appear in naked garb as representations of class society. But one must question this specific Jharkhand nationalism still further: if the oppression suffered by the tribal population of Chota Nagpur is a national question, what must we understand of the oppression of the so-called Harijans or scheduled castes? Why should this latter be considered a class question and the former not? Further, how precisely does caste operate as an institution within class society, and how far does the answer to this question have a bearing on our problem?

One may be permitted a short digression to make the above question a little clearer. It would be futile to deny that the development of capitalist state and society in India has not led to the disintegration of traditional modes of consciousness but to their reinforcement in certain respects. This does not indicate that society is going backwards in time and historical evolution, but rather, that the institutions of capital on the one hand, and the given deeply embedded structures of traditional consciousness and social organization on the other, are *adapting* to each other to produce a peculiar amalgam of caste and class. Caste is a real ideological structure, but not in its traditional form: it is now the *most natural mode of populist politics* in the countryside and by politics is meant not merely electoral activity but various aspects of class conflict. Thus forwardism/backwardism in Bihar, for instance, are not simply symptoms of 'casteism', but represent specific mobilizations of classes within the same caste bloc.²³ And the relevance of all this to our problem is that populism is what nationalist propaganda is all about. It is precisely the populist element within the propaganda for Jharkhand which obstructs the understanding that the Adivasis do not suffer *two* kinds of oppression, the one 'national' and the

23. Political organizations in Jharkhand are no exception.

other 'economic', but *one*, which stems from the role of being a reserve army of cooly-proletariat for capital. The erosion of their culture, of community life is a part of the process through which they have been forced into this role. And the reassertion of their cultural dignity can have a far more revolutionary impact if incorporated within a wider context of development of working class solidarity.

It is not merely to round off analysis that this point is being stressed. The demand for Jharkhand dates back to the 1930's. Have not the Adivasi populist political organizations time and again shown a tendency to go slow on their major demands and incorporate themselves or compromise with the dominant bourgeois national parties? (After all, various other regional populist agitations have achieved much more). Does this not show a weakness within the movement itself rather than merely the opportunism of a few leaders? The movement will gain strength only with the growth of militancy and class solidarity of the workers of Jharkhand. And class solidarity cannot be contained within the ideological limits of communal or regional populism. It had better be realized that class divisions exist even among the Adivasis, and that their populist leaders are not immune to the subtle and not-so-subtle influences of capital. It should also be obvious that Jharkhand is a crucible where several different social problems—such as casteism and racial ideas within the workers, disintegration of tribal communities, the industrial impact on the land etc. etc., all mutually influence and complicate each other. One small historical example will illustrate this point.

In 1939, there took place a strike²⁴ in the Tatanagar Foundry in Jamshedpur managed by one Mr. M.N. Rakshit. There were about 1400 workers in the Foundry, of whom over 1000 were Adivasis both from Bihar and Orissa, and Oriyas. The remainder were from North Bihar, U.P., Punjab etc. The strike lasted from September till end November. The details of the strike need no mention here, but the features which concern us

24. Information on this can be had from File no. 506/1939, (Special Political Section), Bihar State Archives, Patna.

are as follows. Very early in the agitation (which was led by Abdul Bari's union) the manager resorted to blatant casteist/communal methods to break it up. Pandit Nilkantha Das, (the guest Oriya Congressman embittered by his failure to become the Premier of Orissa), who was a friend of the manager, told the Oriya workers to avoid participating in the strike. Further, Mr. Jaipal Singh, then fast attaining importance, who was also a good friend of the manager, took up residence in the Company guest house and formed a separate union for the Adivasi workers and urged them to remain aloof from Abdul Bari's union. Jaipal Singh joined hands with Manek Homi's Labour Federation which systematically escorted a 1000-odd Adivasi and Oriya strike-breakers into the factory everyday. The rights and wrongs of the strike are not being discussed here, but the point being stressed is that when it fizzled out, it was obvious to all contemporary observers that the management had very successfully utilized the racial/communal divisions within the workers to break the strike. A few weeks later, on the 4 December, at Subhas Chandra Bose's rally in Jamshedpur, Mr. Jaipal Singh made a speech²⁵ in which while outlining the demand for Jharkhand, he stated that the Adivasi Sabha was "determined to cooperate with the industries so that our land may flourish," and that it had "declared a war against the reign of terror (of the) professional labour leaders".... He was obviously referring to the strike breaking activity he had indulged in the recent past. It would not be out of place to mention as well that the manager of the Tatanagar Foundry, Mr. M.N. Rakshit, was a prominent supporter of the Adivasi Sabha and the movement of Jharkhand province.

Conclusion

Does all this imply that the movement for Jharkhand is conservative and that its ideological thrust is bogus? Not at all. Given the manner in which the tribals have been degraded, exploited and befooled over several decades, and given the violently racist and violently patriarchal culture of Indo-Gangetic Bihar, it is surprising that the Adivasi reaction has been so

25. Ref. File 491 (I)/1939 (Special Political), Bihar State Archives.

relatively mild. For that barbarian and inhuman culture, probably any shock would only be to the good, and the break-away of Chota Nagpur might stir up some wholesome social movements within Bihar. Furthermore, the demand for Jharkhand has existed for so long that it is only through the living out of this popular aspiration that a newer and deeper social consciousness will be developed. (I say 'through', and not necessarily 'after').

But it will be a tragedy if the workers of Jharkhand remain stuck within the limiting confines of politics and politicians, and if the ideology of nationalist populism successfully blunts the social-revolutionary potential of their aspirations. That this potential exists is clear enough. For example, the discourse of 'forward castes' vs. 'depressed' and 'backward' castes has within the context of (Jharkhand) two edges to it. On the one hand it represents the populist politics of a middle class aspiring to its own growth within the relatively protected confines of a state. On the other, it poses the entire question of the incapacity of the tribals to adapt to the market society and the money-making ethos, with all its hypocrisy, inhumanity, and ruthlessness towards nature and people alike. Since by its own criteria, bourgeois society defines as 'progressive' or 'advanced' those who are capable of slick, sharp and ruthless operation in the market place, therefore, by any revolutionary viewpoint the 'backwardness' of the Adivasis indicates that they may still retain certain human virtues and instincts. Again, on the one hand we often hear a complaint about the inadequate distribution of the so-called fruits of modernization. Jaipal Singh indicated his willingness to collaborate with capitalists in order to 'modernise' Chota Nagpur. Even today several middle class elements (both tribal and non-tribal) within the Jharkhand movement demand further industrialization and the opening up of 'backward' districts and ask only that Adivasis be not neglected in the matter of jobs in these industries. But on the other hand, the movement also contains a latent critique of the modernization which has played so much havoc with the land and people of the region. (The forest-protection movement shows this potential). So it is possible to develop a far more radical approach to the manner in which capitalism ravages the

soil and reinforces racial divisions within the population at large and the working class in particular. It is possible also to explore the question of a more humane and less destructive application of technology. Finally, there is the complaint against being treated as culturally inferior. For some people the desire for 'equal' treatment merely reflects the reactionary desire to climb the hierarchical social ladder of class society (and Brahmanical class/caste society in particular)—this is the well-known Sanskritization syndrome. But the cry for cultural dignity can have a far more critical aspect—and this aspect has been witnessed in the Jharkhand movement. This is the possibility of a far-reaching critique of Hindu society itself (from an atheist rather than religious viewpoint). If the petrified, frozen, hypocritical racism of Indian society is ever to change, this can never be done by sections of 'inferior' groups acquiring a slightly more 'superior' status. It can be done only by a cultural and social onslaught which will attack the foundations of medieval religiosity and formalized, rigid human behaviour. If the Jharkhand movement can make even a small beginning in this direction it will find natural allies in other regions and populations—chiefly the agricultural proletariat and the so-called Scheduled Castes. Those who have suffered the barbarism of centuries still must have their say. And if the proletariat of Jharkhand, regardless of race or caste can join them, they will achieve far more than a separate province,

The Nationality Question in Jharkhand

ANJAN GHOSH & NIRMAL SENGUPTA*

The Movement in Historical Context

In popular beliefs regional or sub-nationalism is synonymous to statehood. The current Jharkhand movement is commonly known as a movement for the creation of a separate state. However, in the foregoing discussions autonomy demand comes only as a secondary, as means to achieve the fundamental changes. It is essential therefore, at the very outset, to clear up the distinctions between nationality and statehood.

In current usage, a 'nation' is either synonymous with a state or its inhabitants, or else it denotes a human group bound together by common solidarity.¹ Such a notion has not been followed here as the state and nation are historically distinct categories. With the potentiality of surplus

* The authors would like to thank their friends Apurba Mukhopadhyaya and Oliver Mendelsohn for their comments on the drafts.

1. D.A. Rustow : "Nation", in D. Sills (ed.), : *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Macmillan, New York, 1968.

production, human communities began to get differentiated between exploiter and exploited. This laid the basis for centralization of power and subsequently to the formation of the state. Not all centralization of power culminated into the state, for where surplus generation was minimal owing to the lack of development of productive forces, as among some tribal communities, stateless or segmentary societies prevailed with decentralized power structures. So the emergence of the state is dependent upon the advancement of the forces of production, division of labour and the growth of civil institutions. Consequently the institution of the state has existed from pre capitalist times. Not so with 'nation' which is the specific form of the state in capitalist society. The preconditions of nationhood have been enumerated by Winternitz :²

"The closer connection between different parts of a country, different sections of the population, arise with modern capitalism. This is a powerful integrating force breaking down the barriers of feudalism, concentrating large masses in big industrial centres, connecting the countryside with the town, producing the middle class which becomes in the beginning the main representative of the new idea of nationality."

In Europe the process of nation-formation was the political consequences of the rise of capitalism. The evolution was organic with the nation-state arising out of the decline of the community ('gemeinschaft') and the rise of 'civil society' ('bürgerliche gesellschaft') with the establishment of bourgeois authority over the state and 'ideological state-apparatuses'.³ Thus the nation could incorporate different nationalities. The distinction between 'nation' and 'nationality' has been spelled out as :⁴

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2. Quoted in A.R. Desai : *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1976 reprint p. 382.
 3. P. Chatterjee, "Bengal : Rise and Growth of a Nationality", *Social Scientist*-37 'August 1975, p. 68.
 4. Jairus Banaji, "Nationalism and Socialism", : *Economic and Political Weekly*, Bombay, September 7, 1974. p. 1538-9.

"Nationalities...are separate linguistic, cultural ethnic formations ('communities' if you like) which existed prior to capitalism and will continue to exist, for an indefinite period, under socialism. Nations on the other hand, are constituted, by a historical process specific to the early stages of capitalism and their unit is a politico-economic unit, embodied in and mediated through the state."

In a sense then nationalities are cultural groups while nations constitute a politico-economic unity imposed under the hegemony of bourgeoisie. The manner in which the bourgeois is able to establish and exercise its hegemony determines the nature of the nation-state.

For the Third World countries including India, the nation-formation process has been different from that of Europe. Nationalism in India was a reaction to the colonial presence. As it did not develop from within, the internal character of the Indian nation did not attain the same qualities as the European nations. Colonialism did not destroy but relied upon the different forms of pre-capitalist relations of production to facilitate its process of exploitation. At the level of politics this meant that classes were not able to intervene in the course of history as polarised entities; much of their articulations were mediated through communitarian structures of caste, religion or language. Nation-formation in India thus implied the forging of institutionalized links between segmental groups and the Congress Party. This was achieved by the efforts of Gandhi—as a great manipulator of symbols he effectively used them to evoke the idea of nationhood among disparate sections of the people overstepping their actual clash of interest.

The loose confederation of interests which was the Congress Party, could integrate in the colonial period, the multiple levels of nationalism in India. At the local or regional level, participation in the national movement was facilitated through the aggregation of primordial loyalties like caste associations, religious groups or regional identities. However, it was only a temporary success. The myth-making which enabled the national movement to cohere in the form of the Congress party

could not be sustained once the object of national unity: colonial presence, was withdrawn. The incomplete hegemony of the capitalist class in India could not accomplish the integration of the state with the civil institutions. On the heels of independence came the Communist challenge from Telengana and soon after, populist demands for linguistic states. The internal class struggles which had all through the national movement been a significant presence in the numerous peasant struggles, was now unleashed. Alongside, the primordial loyalties which had previously been subsumed and channelized against the foreign ruler, now began to surface with the state.

The process of disassociation, which is characteristic of the post-independence phase of Indian nationalism, is expressed in various forms. The two most common forms are caste rivalries and regionalism. In areas like Jharkhand where the nature of exploitation can be characterised as 'internal colonialism', the disassociation from the old and the conglomeration into the new takes the form of regional nationalism, much in the same manner as the growth of Indian nationalism against British colonialism.

It must be noted however, that the process of dissassociation from old nationalities is not the trend specific to India. According to a recent UNESCO study⁵ :

"Recent studies have shown that in many parts of Asia, the so-called marginal sectors, with a backward self-consuming economy, and small craft types producers are not only a residue of the past, with all its folklore and traditionalism, but also real recreations of modern society. A strange paradox operates : in the process of its growth, capitalism generates pre-capitalism (or more exactly, non-capitalism), industrialization creates crafts....

"...somewhat similar process of destruction and reconstruction apply to the cultural aspects. Ethnic

5. Roger Bartra, in the preface to *Trends in Ethnic Group Relations in Asia and Oceania*, UNESCO, Paris. 1979.

phenomena tend to reappear in societies in which racial, ethnic and national barriers have already been declared to have been overcome. The problem appears in a particular way in each country but, in general, we discover that, not only were colonial phenomena just superficially masked by modernization but also that a new series of problems have arisen....Terms acquire new meanings that we do not yet fully understand and need to study further."

Not only in parts of Asia, such resurgences of communal, ethnic, racial and tribal bonds have been witnessed in the more recent period in all the new states in Africa and Asia. The process is not confined to only such states where, because of the history, the levels of national integration have been relatively low, a view often put forward by some researchers.⁶ One notes that there is a resurgence of ethnicity and intrastate regionalism even in the most developed capitalist countries like the U.S.A.⁷ or the European states.⁸ Bourgeois consolidation

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6. "Building a nation-State is a slow and complicated affair, and most of the political entities created in the past fifty years are never going to complete this process The new states that have the best chance of success are those which correspond fairly closely to old political units; those where the experience of living together for many generations within a continuing political framework has given the people some sense of identity".

—Joseph R. Strayer, "The Historical Experience of Nation-building in Europe" in C.E. *Comparative Modernization*, Free Press, New York, 1976.

7. Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, Second Edition, 1970.
8. The same trend is observed also in Europe. See P.A. Gourevitch, "The Reemergence of "Peripheral Nationalism" Some Comparative Speculations on the Spatial Distribution of Political Leadership and Economic Growth", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 21 (3), July, 1979.

proces has failed to perpetuate the national integrities** everywhere in the present epoch.

It is only since the 1920's, since when capitalism has made rapid advance into Jharkhand, the bonds of kinship and ethnicity, the primitive identities those were in the process of dissolution—became stronger in Jharkhand because of the appreciation of the political advantages of the continuation of tribe as an entity.⁹ Currently, it has taken the shape of sub-national consolidation process all over Jharkhand. However, it follows that though at present the different communities in Jharkhand may be united for a single cause, the differences between them may reappear if Jharkhand emerges as a full-fledged nation-state, even after a long process of consolidation under the leadership of the regional bourgeoisie. The search of significance of the current movement, has to be made therefore, not in the formation of autonomous state or in the apparent consolidation of Jharkhandi nationality, but in some more fundamental features—in the contribution of the movement in obliteration of the community and regional distinctions.

Tribe and Nationality

The appreciation of Jharkhand nationalism as a historical phenomenon becomes difficult when internal conditions are taken into consideration—the people here are the 'tribals', far behind on the way of attaining territorial consciousness. Even the most liberal researchers like B.K. Roy Burman, who consider

** Whether the socialist block countries have been successful to solve the ethnic problems is open to question. The available informations confirm a negative view. In the analysis here we have not entered into this aspect of the question since in Jharkhand the present debate is between bourgeois nationalism and working class politics. However, care has been taken and let us repeat it—we do not suggest any of the socialist models as the acceptable alternative without question. The analysis here relates to more fundamental social characteristics like exploitation and working class solidarity in which the achievements of the existing socialist countries have been questioned by many observers.

9. K. Suresh Singh "Colonial Transformation of Tribal Society in, Middle India", *EPW*, July 29, 1978, pp. 1227.

the Jharkhand tribes as not primitive but 'post primitive', are reluctant to admit that they are advanced enough to exhibit sufficient territorial integrity. Roy Burman characterises the nationality movement in Jharkhand as of an infantile variety- 'proto nationalism'.¹⁰

It is worthwhile therefore, to explore in some detail, how primitive are the tribes of Jharkhand. The scientific concept of a tribe (for the purpose of enlistment in the list of scheduled tribes) was never defined by the Indian government. Indeed, this difficulty is observed all over the world—most of the so-called tribes in the modern world are called so because of 'popular' beliefs. The notion of a tribe rarely meets any scientific criteria.¹¹ The closest concept one reaches in defining the tribes in India is, following Bailey,¹² the communities which are relatively homogeneous and self-sufficient, barring of course, the stray individuals like the artisans, who may be internal to these self-sufficient, socio-economic formations. On the contrary, a caste society is based upon institutionalised segmentation (separate functions) thus creating interdependence. Obviously, the distinction is not sharp, and there may exist many communities in the frontiers between the two types.

Instead of an anthropological identification, if one proceeds along the course of history, one may find a more meaningful distinction between the so-called tribes and the rest. While sedantary agriculture had characterised the economies of the riverine plains, and under favourable natural conditions enabled the use of superior agricultural technology, in the less fertile hilly and forest tracts the scope of development of agriculture

10 B.K. Roy Burman "The Post-primitives of Chotanagpur—Identities Dilemmas and Ethnic Relations", in *Trends in Ethnic Group Relations*, *op. cit.*

11. For an interesting general discussion see Morton H. Fried, *The Notion of Tribe*, Cummings Publishing, Philippines, 1975.

12. F.G. Bailey *Tribe, Caste and Nation a Study of Political Activity and Political Change in Highland Orissa*, Oxford University Press, Bombay 1960.

was less and the people were dependent on forest products and animal husbandry in addition to agriculture. The superior agricultural technology allowed for considerable surplus production, and, in consequence, the societies in the plains were more developed and more differentiated. The less productive agriculture in the difficult terrains did not produce enough surplus and the societies there were less differentiated in which internal self-sufficiencies and old community ties survived to a great extent. This is why the anthropologists have been able to find most of the 'tribes' in the less fertile hilly and forest tracts.

Because of the relatively high degree of differentiation, which is otherwise termed as 'civilization', the people of the plains have always considered themselves superior to these 'hill and forest people'. They are referred to with pejoratives—'Moi', in Vietnam, 'Meo' in Thailand or 'junglees' in India all are synonymous to 'savages'; 'Kha' in Laos means 'slaves'. The difference in the economic and social structure that arose out of the distinct ecological settings, helped the identification of the two distinct people—the 'civilized' and the 'adivasis'; the relative poverty and lower levels of technological and social development in those difficult terrains produced the image of inferiority. Even after the advent of capitalism the same image has been perpetuated to the advantage of the new system. The underdeveloped Third World itself is differentiated now with the 'adivasis' occupying the lowest rung of the modern society. There lies the significance of the term 'tribe'—nationalism of the 'tribes' are very different in character from the nationalism of the non-tribals.

The difference has been perpetuated over ages by the inaccessibilities of the hilly terrains, but not fully. Over the years the different communities and the different regions have been assimilated with the society and culture of the plains in varying degrees. In this circumstance it is impossible to draw the exact dividing line where the communities are 'tribes' and where they have ceased to be tribes. Though the anthropologists in India accept that "a tribe is a tribe which is included in the list of

Scheduled Tribes",¹³ the official list has not been drawn on the basis of any well defined criteria. It is an impressionistic list and has little rationale. Thus, there are several communities like the Mahatos of Jharkhand, who are as much tribals as many of the Scheduled Tribes.¹⁴ The same community may exhibit primitiveness in the interior of the region while being predominantly an assimilated community in the borders of the plains. Thus, the under-development that is conveyed by scheduling some communities as 'tribes' is actually a phenomenon of regional under-development wrongly categorised in terms of communities. It is noteworthy that the pejorative use of the word 'adivasi (*adi*-original; *vast*-inhabitant) was made for all the indigenous people in these inaccessible tracts, irrespective of their economic conditions; its connotation as 'tribes' is an official discovery.

In enlistment of Scheduled Tribes the economic and social levels of development has been considered as a criterion and many of the comparatively advanced communities in these regions have been excluded from the list which is often mis-explained as that they were not the autochthones. But even without considering these advanced section among the indigenous communities, one doubts whether the tribes (the scheduled ones) were as primitive as the image that is created about them by the term. The region might have been less developed than the riverine plains, nevertheless those were developed enough to form several states in the past¹⁵ They were in the process of forming developed economies, territorial integrity and regional consciousness. When Chotanagpur Raj was annexed by the Mughals in 1585 A.D. it was a formidable state, ruling over the communities over a wide territory in Jharkhand. Its unified political existence, at least four hundred years old, had considerable impact on unifying the cultures and communities of

13. Jaganath Pathy et. al., "Tribal Studies in India, An appraisal" *The Eastern Anthropologist*, XXIX (4), 1976.

14. See the article by B.K. Mehta in this volume.

15. e.g. Surajit Sinha, "State Formation and Rajput Myth in Central India, *Man in India*, 42 (2), 1961 K. Suresh Singh, "State-Formation in Tribal Society Some Preliminary Observations", *Journal of Indian Anthropological Society*, 6 (2), October. 1971.

a region. Therefore, it should not surprise one to find that a nascent lingua franca, some common cultural traits are found all over Jharkhand, cutting across the community barriers.

A more serious objection is that the concept of tribe denies the dynamic qualities of social existence and consciousness. The hill regions were less accessible in the past, but not so after the colonial rule began and far less so after the rapid mining and industrial development had begun in that area. Technological options were available; ecological balance was violated, resulting in large scale emigration of the traditional hilly people. The traditional organisation of production had been radically altered. In consequence, much of the traditional social organisation became irrelevant and incompatible. Education and other modern social amenities spread. Thus, whatever might have been the truth in the belief about the primitiveness of the hill people; there seems little substance in subscribing to the same beliefs today. The one-time tribes are as much a part of the modern capitalist system as the rest of the people in the country. The past becomes a part of the present; the primitiveness of the Jharkhandis is only a continuation of the old image with little substance. The distinction from the people of the mainstream exists in their distinct pattern of social existence, in their lot of destitution within the modern capitalist order, but not in their relative position in the historical stages of development. One may argue further that the integration into the modern world is a more recent phenomenon; the process of shaking off primitiveness in consciousness is a time consuming process. Factually this may be incorrect, for the colonial domination over tribal India is as old as in other places. Even otherwise, this argument is questionable. Only about twenty years back the tribes named Ao, Angami, Sema, Lhota etc. were distinct from one another in the territories they occupied, in their cultures and even in languages.¹⁶ In this remarkably short period of time they have emerged as a single nationality of the Nagas of today. The conditions why certain tribes have already emerged as nationalities

16. Verrier Elwin *Nagaland*, Shillong, 1961. For the recent developments see Udayon Mishra "The Naga National Question", *EPW*, April 8, 1978, p. 621-2.

and others have not is beyond the scope of the present analysis. The example however, shows that the conventional belief about the process of formation of nationalities like about 'time' does not withstand the test of reality.

The example of formation of Naga nationality also contradicts another predominant belief. This is about the criteria of national integration—it is commonly argued that only if the people within a certain territory exhibit some common criteria like same language or cultural pattern, they may emerge as a nationality. It is very often doubted whether multilingual, multi-cultural people like those of Jharkhand can unite into a single nationality. However, Nagaland is not a lone example; in the history of the world such seemingly heterogeneous groups of people have frequently emerged as single nationalities. In an exhaustive survey Lowy has aptly demolished the criteria-based theories of nationalities. He arrives at a very interesting, but not new conclusion that it is the 'subjective factors' which decide the emergence of a nationality in the long run. History has shown repeatedly that if a community *decides* to emerge as a national entity—a decision which comes out of such historical conditions like persecution, oppression etc.—it may emerge as a nationality even if the generally accepted common criteria for the formation of a nationality may not be fulfilled.¹⁷

In all, it seems that the emergence of a nationality in Jharkhand is not just a possibility but a certainty. The objective condition for it—the external character of exploitation and oppression, is so vividly present that the motivation to such unification on the part of the subjects is very strong. It also follows that the ultimate character of this nationality may be very fascinating. In a hair-splitting argument the anthropologists may be able to prove that in reality the Mahados are not the earliest settlers¹⁸ but have immigrated from the plains in the more recent period.¹⁹ In spite of that they may be considered

17. Michael Lowy, "Marxism and the National Question", *New Left Review*, March-April, 1976.

18. As has been claimed by B.K. Mehta, See his article in this volume.

19 K. Suresh Singh "Colonial Transformation", *op. cit.* p 1225.

as locals—and even referred to as *adivasis*—if only they themselves and other communities in Jharkhand decide to do so. Even if Sadani is not a distinct language in the linguistic analysis, the efforts of the Jharkhandis²⁰ can ultimately establish it as one. And finally, the new identity may be such that it also includes the industrial workers most of whom have immigrated in the recent past. In the usual notion of a nationality it may be incomprehensible. But objective conditions for such unity exists.²¹ In Jharkhand the immigrant working class has already taken part in the nationalist movement and if the role of the subjective factors really be the deciding element in the emergence of a national identity then the initiation to this end has already been made in the joint worker—peasant rallies on Jharkhand Diwas²². History may have reserved another surprise for the world to see.

Class Character of the Jharkhand Movement

In all countries the middle class has been the main representative of the new idea of nationality in the initial stages. But the manner in which the bourgeoisie has been able to exercise its hegemony has determined the nature of the movement. In Jharkhand however, both of these classes are very weak. Thanks to the missionary efforts, the middle class was somewhat better developed even in the early twenties of this century. The growth, though limited to certain regions and among certain communities, could initiate the nationalist movement even as early as in the 'forties'. Since then, particularly after the independence, the growth of this class has been substantial owing to the special privileges granted to the Scheduled Tribe students and youth. But the politics of privilege is useful in co-option and pacification of the most vocal section, and the middle class in Jharkhand has fulfilled this expectation of the ruling class at least in parts. Their vacillation is also but natural in absence of a strong regional bourgeoisie.

20. See articles by B.P. Keshari and A.K. Jha in this volume

21. See article by Arun Sinha in this volume.

22. See article, "Background of Jharkhand Question" in this volume.

It follows from the history discussed earlier, that the tribes were never as homogeneous as is commonly believed.

"There always existed within a tribe a measure of distinction between the high and low in terms of social and physical distance, notion of purity and pollution, prestige and status, habits and customs, etc. The colonial system created and strengthened a threefold division with the feudatory chiefs/zamindars at the top, the well-to-do headman in the middle and the general mass at the bottom. A class of insider *diku* and professional tribal money-lenders also grew up as the unintended result of the anti-land alienation laws, which restricted transfer of land from tribals to non-tribals. A rich stratum of tribal buyers of land emerged...."²³

But this internal differentiation did not grow to a point of complete alienation of one stratum from another. The bourgeoisie that developed from among the adivasis was not merely weak but also not yet fully cut off from their primordial identities. The class character of the movement therefore needs further probing.

Modern capitalism does not exclude pre-capitalist forms of exploitation, and the Jharkhandis are predominantly connected with this form of exploitation. It is in this context of disintegration by and re-integration into an externally controlled economic system within which the adivasis have to exist, that the question of national self-determination for Jharkhand needs to be posed. It is only in this context, that the present phase of the Jharkhand movement is a continuation as well as distinct from the nineteenth century adivasi movements like the Kol Ulgulan or the Santhal Hul.

By the middle of the 18th century the communitarian adivasi society was already encompassed in a larger social system. Its isolation had been broken and the seeds of its dissolution sown. First it was Hinduism which expedited the disintegration by incorporating the adivasi communities into its social division of

23. K. Suresh Singh, "Colonial Transformation ...", *op. cit.* p. 11277.

labour represented by the caste system. The Raja of Chota Nagpur in order to legitimize his Rajput status brought in Brahmins and settled them with land grants in his kingdom. A system of granting jagirs, previously unknown, to the Raja's relatives has a spread effect and jagirdars in turn soon began to grant Zamindaris to those who provided favours. Often in an effort to pay-off debts the jagirdars granted zamindaris to Hindu mahajans. Thus began the alien influx of Hindu Mahajans, thikadars and zamindars which had a devastating impact on the adivasi economy. The adivasis control over land was reduced as peasants from the plains were inducted and given rights to the land. The result was :

"A new mode of production thus emerged. A consequences of the imposition of the feudal super-structure on the tribal society was its breakdown and fragmentation into distinct social strata based on corresponding distribution of power and economic interest in land and defined in terms of ritual status"²⁴

The process of peasantization of the adivasis due to outside thrust culminated with the incorporation of Jharkhand in the British Raj. Individual proprietorship in land introduced through the Permanent Settlement attached a legal sanctity to ownership and gave a fillip to alienation of land from the adivasis. Enfolded within a socio-economic formation which they could neither comprehend nor control, the adivasis were increasingly pauperised. The net result was the immiserisation and eviction of the adivasis from their land which led many to seek work elsewhere especially in the tea-plantations of Assam and North Bengal or in the coal mines in the neighbouring districts of Bihar and Bengal.²⁵ The idea of external control of the adivasis life began to attain credence.

Alongside, the forest, an essential aspect of the adivasi economy, in course of time became the happy hunting ground

24. K.S. Singh, "Colonial Transformation, ...", op. cit., pp. 1225.

25. K. Suresh Singh op. cit., also his *The Dust Storm and the Hanging Mist*, Firma, K.L.M., Calcutta, 1966, ch. 1.

of the thikadars. The indiscriminate destruction of forest in order to obtain lucrative timber jeopardised the ecological balance of adivasi existence. Mining and the extraction of mineral ores also instead of benefitting the adivasis pauperised them for they had little control over either the means or process of production. Minerals and ores were sent out of the region as raw materials and so did not aid the process of development of the region. But on the other hand, mining by hollowing the earth underground severely impaired the capacity of the soil to retain moisture, thus reducing the productivity of land in the surrounding areas. Again Jharkhand is largely a mono-crop area and so the neglect and at times deliberate destruction of the sources of irrigation²⁶ led to a contraction of the agricultural base. In this way the adivasi population was forcibly separated from all the possible means of production and transformed into a vast reserve army of 'coolie' labour.²⁷ At the same time the relatively unskilled adivasis (relative to capitalist skill requirements) found themselves marginalised with diminishing options of livelihood.²⁸ The adivasis were forced to fall back upon their traditional occupations for livelihood with ever-increasing intensity. Even the jobs where they predominated as in the mines and quarries, were slowly foreclosed to them as the jobs became better paying. The outsiders began to dominate here also by virtue of their better access to the labour market.²⁹ The adivasis still continued to provide cheap labour in and out of Jharkhand, but their sense of deprivation went on increasing.

The Jharkhand movement, therefore, is characterised by a dichotomy. The extension of capitalism in Jharkhand has both disassociated and intensified the links of the adivasis with their traditional modes of survival. The movement on the one hand

26. See article "Background of Jharkhand Question" in this volume.

27. See article by Dilip Simeon in this volume.

28. By Marginalisation we mean a process whereby a section of the people is compelled through their integration into the capitalist mode of production, to reproduce themselves by reducing their subsistence level. In such situation economic exploitation is accompanied by cultural discrimination.

29. See articles, "Background of Jharkhand Question and" by Stuart Corbridge in this volume.

is rooted in the pauperisation created by capitalism and therefore is a struggle of the working people against capitalism. On the other hand it is also a process of exploitation whose agents are predominantly outsiders and hence is a struggle of the 'local people' against the outsiders. The pauperised Jharkhandi peasants have only become 'coolie' labourers who find employment occasionally as agricultural labourers or in the urban informal sector or through seasonal migration to other places. They serve the necessities of capitalism, but in all these unorganised activities they are unable to achieve the high level of consciousness of the modern working class. Their historical image prevents them from getting better industrial jobs and becoming the organised class conscious proletariat. In consequence the modern industrial proletariat in Jharkhand fail to establish its solidarity with the working people and suffers in their own struggles against the bourgeoisie.

The current resurgence of the Jharkhand movement is not so much for the revamping of the Jharkhand Party which was done by N.E. Horo in 1970, as for the activities of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha which instead of being bogged down only in electoral politics spearheaded the movement for recovery of alienated adivasi lands and the *Dhan Kato Andolan* (Forcible Harvesting) in 1972-73 in Dhanbad and Santhal Parganas districts. The movement spread into neighbouring districts and today also includes the struggle of adivasis in Singhbhum to preserve the forests and claim their rights over forest lands. The statehood demand forms but only a part of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha movement.

In contrast, the efforts for the consolidation of a nationality has been prominent and an increasing trend in Jharkhand movement. In spite of its economic struggles the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha has been active in initiating a cultural awakening too.³⁰ Organised and unorganised efforts at cultural awakening are noticed in the fields of language, literature,³¹ and other

30. See article by R. N. Maharaj and K. G. Iyer in this volume.

31. See article by B.P. Keshari in this volume.

spheres of cultural lives. Some of these efforts find statehood a necessary pre-requisite for the realisation of the potential.³²

In-so-far as the nationality movement in Jharkhand occurs along these lines it fulfills the goals of the working class as well as that of the indigeneous bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie. But harmony in all aspects of the movement is not possible for these classes differ in their respective interests. Parallel to the democratisation process there exists innumerable undercurrents of conflict among the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie in Jharkhand: between the tribals and non-tribals, between Christian converts and non-converts. Even now one learns about complaints that those of the culturally dominant district of Ranchi receives unduely large share of all the facilities the government has extended to the scheduled tribes. One finds the condemnation of praiseworthy traditional values in the name of progress, by the petty-bourgeois activists.³³ The bourgeois idea of nationalism is not one of establishing a truely democratic order. It strives for equality at one level and discrimination at another level. The bourgeois elements (and petty-bourgeoisie) active within the present phase of the Jharkhand movemnt variously conceive the goal of the movement as establishing domination of the Christian tribes or the non-converts, of establishing a 'land for the tribals' and so on. Some of them have demanded extradition of immigrant workers. If not explicitly, such streams are also perceived. And finally, the emotional concept of national unity against the outsiders undermines the internal differentiation and obscures the process of exploitation by 'insider dikus'. The national question is characterised by a dichotomy-one of "consistent democratism on all aspects of the national question" and the other "the 'positive' activity of the bourgeoisie striving to fortify nationalism".³⁴

That the movement for '*alag* (separate) Jharkhand' is already quite aware of the problems like the vicious character of

32. Ibid.

33. See article by Radha Kumar in this volume.

34. V.I. Lenin : "Critical Remarks on the National Question", in *Selections from Lenin and Stalin on National and Colonial Question*, Calcutta Book House, Calcutta, 1975, p. 9. Italics as in original.

bourgeois nationalism, is of course denied by some observers who prefer to view it as a 'nativist' phenomenon.³⁵ But this awareness is amply reflected in the political literature of the movement.³⁶ Moreover, today the struggle of the adivasis is not simply against 'outsiders' but by and large against the 'outsider-exploiters'. There is already the indication that the 'insider dikus' may not be allowed to prevail at the completion of the movement. In other words, the struggle for self-determination in Jharkhand can become a part of the working class movement with the prospect of an alternate course of development from self-determination of the community to that of the class. In a region like Jharkhand with a community mainly consisting of cheap labourers and in an era when the regional bourgeoisie is weak and the incapacities of the class in effecting a bourgeois democratic transformation has largely been acknowledged, the nationality struggle may not follow the traditional course of bourgeois nationalism. But the same (bourgeois) process of democratisation of the society may be essential for the proletariat and the same tasks of the bourgeoisie may now be taken over by the proletariat to do away with the segmentations and distinctions within the rank of the proletariat, whose origins may be traced in the past but whose perpetuation occurs solely due to capitalism. The proletariat in Jharkhand has already shown this consciousness.

Working class and Nationalism

The incomplete nature of bourgeois transformation process in the present epoch has indeed, been of immense help to the bourgeoisie in its more efficient operations towards partly containing the working class struggle. The pauperised Jharkhandi peasants have only become 'coolie' labourers who find employment occasionally as agricultural labourers or in the urban informal sector or through migration to other places for low-paid jobs. They serve the necessities of capitalism, but under the characteristic technological conditions and the unorganised nature of all these activities, they are unable to achieve the high

35. For instance M. Weiner, *Sons of the Soil*, OUP, New Delhi, 1978.

36. *Jharkhand Baria*, (Irregular), Ranchi, No. 1, 1978.

level of consciousness of the modern working class. In consequence the class struggles of the proletariat suffer from uneven development of class consciousness among its ranks. This does not only weaken the proletarian class struggle but also makes the appearance of conflicting segmentary interests among the ranks of the working class. The modern industrial proletariat appear to be privileged while the rest—which includes the scheduled tribes appear deprived from those opportunities by the actually employed ones. The distinction that marks Third World capitalism from the early European capitalism is that in the present phase all levels of production relations are not transformed—craft type of production employing 'coolie' labourers are as much the recreation of modern capitalism as are the creation of highly advanced technological units. By refraining from revolutionising the whole of the production process capitalism in the current epoch, prevents the proletariat from intervening in the course of the history as polarised entities.

Why does this uneven development of Organisation of production occur? Is it because certain parts of productive activities cannot be organised in better ways? Is it because the scope of technological development in certain activities is limited and, as is often argued, the low productivity of labour does not permit better rates of payments and conditions of work? This is incorrect. In Jharkhand itself, the conditions of labour have improved from very bad to the most modern amenities in certain industries like the coal mines, after the miners demanded better conditions and took to struggle. Arduous and badly paid jobs do not exist because of lack of alternative—but because there exist labourers who can be sent for to do these.³⁷ The labour movement therefore, is the motive for technological advancement in all such cases.

But the movement of the coal miners remained a trade-based worker's struggle; it did not touch the labour market itself. If the conditions of labour improved those improved only in the confines of the industries, the employees of which were engaged in the struggle. The adivasis remained available for the ard-

³⁷. See article by Dilip Simeon in this volume.

uous and badly paid jobs, and in consequence, such jobs remained prevalent in the overall economy barring a handful of industries with some history of struggle. The labour movement became a motive force for development only within the confines of certain activities. But against it, their powers for further negotiation were weakened. The pauperised adivasi peasants constituting a vast reserve of labour became increasingly differentiated from the organised industrial proletariat. On the one hand this reserve gave the bourgeoisie an edge over the workers in bargaining, on the other hand the vast army of aspirants identifying the industrial proletariat as obstacles to their achievements came to bear conflicting interests with them. The gains of historical movement of the working class, began understood as the 'privileges' granted to certain ethnic stereotypes by the bourgeoisie. The victory in their struggles for betterment of conditions was achieved by the class not necessarily by the individuals who had participated in the struggle. Thus, many adivasi workers lost their jobs after the nationalisation of coal mines—in all future employment in coal mines, the adivasis were rarely considered suitable. The working class movement in its distorted perspective became the unwitting accomplice of capitalism in initiating racial and ethnic resurgence.

For a number of reasons the adivasis of Jharkhand constitute the reserve of cheap labour. The added impoverishment of an already (because of difficult ecological conditions) pauperised people lead them to fall back upon any avenue of employment. They will work in slave-like conditions in and out of Jharkhand for that allows survival. Their image outside prevents them from getting better jobs. Demoralized in the conditions of work in a sub-subsistence economy they have acquired a reputation for lethargy and recklessness. The primitiveness ascribed to them lead to questioning of their abilities in undertaking skilled jobs and occupations requiring steady perservance. Incorrect though these are, the image persists and breeds ethnic segmentation within the labour market. In reality, the adivasis still inculcate certain cultural norms which go against the requirements of discipline in modern industries. Their liquor-habits

and happy-go-lucky attitudes actually lead at times to such failure. All these are cited for justifying the discrimination.

History manifests itself only at the level of consciousness of its actors; the significance of the current, however, lies in the preoccupation of the future. In the characteristic pattern of intersectoral articulation in Jharkhand, the peasant nationalism indeed, is a struggle for the development of the working class. Where there is a definite interest of the industrial capital to maintain the depressed conditions of the rural economies³⁸, the efforts of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha to develop the agriculture or to assert adivasis' rights over the forest produce are effectively struggles against the exploitation including that of the industrial capital. The traditional subsistence economy of the adivasis was partly destroyed through the land settlement process, through the moneylenders, by the neglect of the sources of irrigation, by indiscriminate destruction of and restrictions imposed on the forests. Without that the once-content people would not have left their homes trying to sell their labour power. At the same instance, these were preserved at these depressed conditions so as to enable the transfer of parts of the production and reproduction cost of industrial labour which would have otherwise fallen on the industrial companies. Against this destruction-preservation strategy of the capital, the adivasis had revolted earlier in revivalist manner trying to re-establish the old order. In the phase of the nationalist struggle in accordance with the more modern philosophy, the outlook towards the rural economy is more dynamic. The activities of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha to renovate irrigation tanks, towards diversification of cropping pattern, for introducing high-yielding variety seeds or to give a boost to their livestock ³⁹ are cases in point. By improving the rural living conditions the movement is not only reducing the adivasis urge to sell their labour power for the sake of survival but also is increasing their requirements for survival. The social wages

38. See article by Stuart Corbridge in this volume.

39. See article by Mahataj and Iyer in this volume.

acceptable by these people will not be as low as it was-the industries will have to sanction a bigger pie for the 'cheap' labourers. Further, through the social reform attempts like the anti-liquor campaign⁴⁰, the movement is uprooting a pre-industrial tradition and reforming the adivasi towards fulfilment of the requirements of industrial discipline.⁴¹ This may ameliorate the conditions under which the adivasis are not considered suitable for responsible industrial jobs. No less important is the self-assertion through the spirit of the movement, as a force to challenge the prejudicial discrimination practised against the adivasis in the process of recruitment for the better industrial jobs. Through all such programmes the nationalist movement is in fact effectively bringing down the segmentation and the hierarchy among the ranks of the proletariat, though none of these programmes have been developed consciously with such an end in mind. In addition, as a consequence of the increased requirements of the labourers, the primitive techniques of the industries employing cheap labourers have to be changed to allow for better payments to the employees. The craft type of production will have to be replaced by the modern technologies which provide better conditions of labour and better scopes of organisation. The impact of the movement thus, extends as far as to effect technological development, organisation of the workers as well as consolidation of the rank of the proletariat by abolishing the distinctions between organised and unorganised, low-paid and high-paid, superior and inferior human beings.

In all earlier stages the adivasis have tried to emulate the culture of the *dikus*, be it either along the Sanskritisation path⁴² or the rank path⁴³. But none of these efforts have been able to raise the image of the adivasis. Nor have been the welfare efforts of the government any more successful to raise this image in the way of 'modernisation'. To secure equal

40. Ibid.

41. See article by Dilip Simeon in this volume.

42. M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, Berkley, University of California Press, 1966.

43. Martin Orans, *A tribe in Search of a Great Tradition*, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1968.

opportunities for all communities, the government has made certain special provisions like the reservation of jobs. Leave alone the fact that only a few individuals receive such privileges, under this kind of patronage, the highest rank to which an adivasi can hope to rise is the position of a Deputy-X (or its variants, e.g. the Assistant-X, the Sub-X, and the Vice-X), never being considered advanced enough to be able to handle anything with full responsibility.⁴⁴ The patronage inflicts a sense of dependence and inferiority among the recipients, and instead of elevating their social status, those in practice perpetuate the image of second grade citizenship of the adivasis. Emancipation in real sense, can come only through the self-determination movement, not by emulation of *diku* culture, that by development as class conscious proletariat. A place of dignity can be earned only by self-assertion; the sense of equality that is achieved through struggle has no parallel. The developments following the outbreak of the Jharkhand movement are already suggestive.

Contrary to such notions that the nationalist movement is primarily a movement in the bourgeois class or that the peasant-based Jharkhand movement envisage a conflict with the immigrant working class, the facts clearly show that it effects consolidation of the working class. Beginning with the worker-peasant rally to celebrate the Jharkhand Diwas, the predominantly 'outsider' working class in Jharkhand has been more and more associated with the movement and thereby, has exerted considerable influence in developing the programme of the movement. Thus appear such definitions⁴⁵-a Jharkhandi is a producer irrespective of caste, tribe or nation, residing in the Jharkhand region-which are completely incoherent in bourgeois definition of nationality. A recent manifesto⁴⁶ declares :

44. Hazel Lutz and Ram Dayal Munda, "Tribal Change and Development in India" in P. Dash Sharma ed., *The Passing Scene in Chotanagpur*, Maitryee Publishing, Ranchi, 1980, pp. 102.

45. See article 'Background of the Jharkhand Question' in this volume.

46. Devendra Manjhi, M.L.A. : *Ulgulan Chalukana* (in Hindi), 1979. It was his election manifesto for the Parliamentary election held in January 1980.

"What kind of a Jharkhand do we want? The Morcha's reply is that we want Jharkhand free of exploitation; a Jharkhand where those who work will eat and those who loot will go."

Evidently, in the course of the movement, along with the democratisation process, the awareness that it is ultimately a struggle by the proletariat against exploitation is also gaining ground. The nationalist movement in the Fourth World is therefore, a temporary phase but an integral part of the class struggle to effect development of the proletariat as a class for itself. The nationalist struggle under the proletarian leadership itself imparts the idea of its own obsolescence as the adivasis gradually learn that in order to end exploitation they will have to unite with the working masses from all over.

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